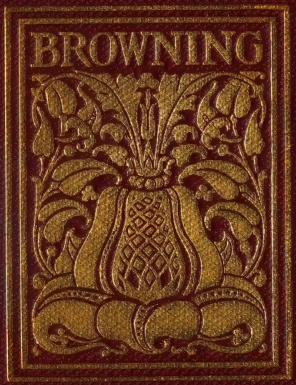

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THE RING AND THE BOOK

VOL. I

CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DELLA PIEVE, AREZZO.

" Now the church changed tone —
Now, taken I found out first that life and death
Are means to an end, that passion was both,
Indistinctly mistress of the man
Whose form of moreship is self-sacrifice :
Now, from the stone lungs sighed the scanned voice
' Leave that live passion, come be dead unlit me ! ' "

THE RING AND THE BOOK, vi. 980-986.

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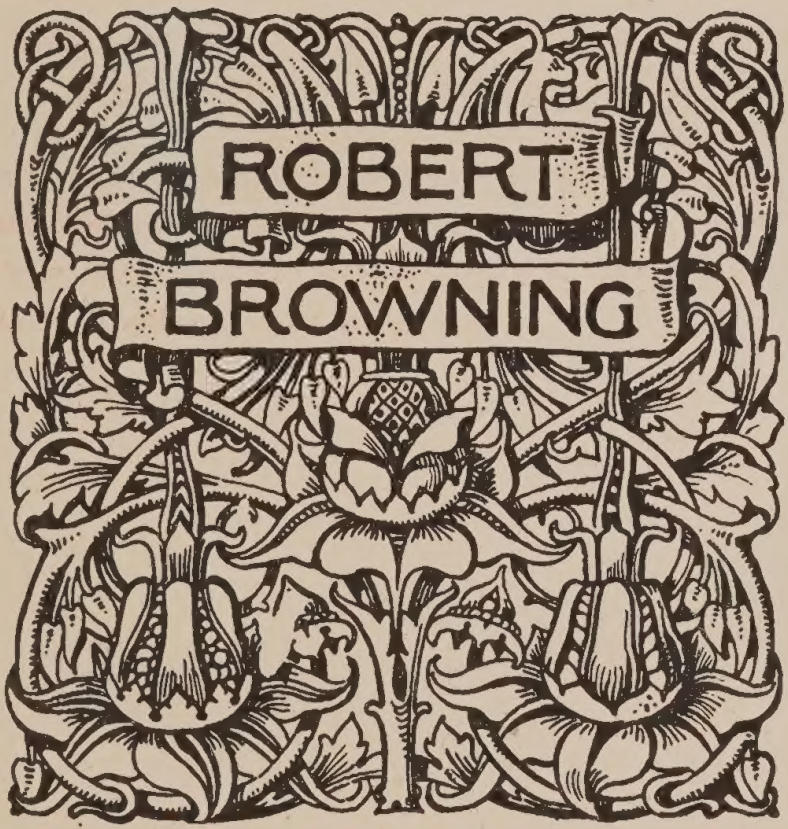

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Complete Works. v.6

THE RING AND THE BOOK

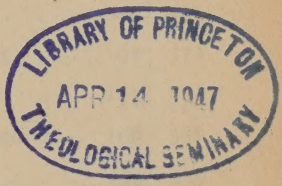
BY

ROBERT BROWNING

From the Author's Revised Text

Edited with Introductions and Notes by

CHARLOTTE PORTER AND HELEN A. CLARKE



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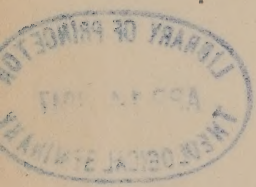

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

"The Ring and the Book," in the estimation of one of its most appreciative critics, James Thomson, may be classed among those rare works of literature, philosophy, or art which give the impression of being too gigantic to have been wrought out by a single man. With the unerring instinct of the poet for subtle and illuminating analogies, he compared it in its grandeur and complexity to a great Gothic cathedral. "For here truly," he says, "we find the soaring towers and pinnacles, the multitudinous niches with their statues, the innumerable intricate traceries, the gargoyles wildly grotesque; and, within, the many colored light through the stained windows, with the red and purple of blood predominant, the long, pillared, echoing aisles, the altar with its piteous crucifix and altar-piece of the Last Judgment, the organ and choir pealing their *Miserere* and *De Profundis* and *In Excelsis Deo*, the side chapels and confessionals, the fantastic wood-carvings, the tombs with effigies sculptured supine; and, beneath, yet another chapel, as of death, and the solemn sepulchral crypts. The counterparts of all these, I dare affirm, may veritably be found in this immense and complicate structure, whose foundations are so deep and whose crests are so lofty. Only as a Gothic cathedral has been termed a petrified forest, we

must image this work as a vivified cathedral, thrilling hot, swift life through all its marble nerves."

This analogy of the living cathedral illustrates the richness of the poem as an artistic product. It involves, moreover, a characteristic difference or development from the methods of Gothic art. It is by virtue of the life instinct within it that Gothic art and the art of "The Ring and the Book" are akin; but it is the distinctive trait of the art of the poem that it parts utterly with the rigidity and stability of inorganic form. The shifting, flowing trend of all the independent parts of the poem toward an organic unity of design is the only sort of fixity to which Browning's art is bound.

The social organism, made up of living, growing personalities, each intrinsically valuable, but dependent on one another for the working out of their ultimate significance, is the closest exemplar of the artistic plan of the poem. Not content with social material, the poet devises an artistic method that is also social.

His own share as artist in the creation and purport of the poem falls into place, at the outset, as itself also an element to be taken account of in the interplay of human personalities behind the action presented in the bare facts of the story. What the poet's own touch upon the facts was, what intent he held toward them, and what his art's impress upon them might be worth, are, broadly speaking, the questions upon which he arouses interest in his first book.

This first book is in the nature of a prologue to the poem, and so original in its conception as to have caused much querulous grumbling among that class of critics which feels aggrieved when brought face to face with something not before met in its experience. In-

stead of presenting a more or less ornamental generalization of the poet's purpose, or a symbolic picture of the underlying motive of the poem, or the even less vital rhetorical flourishes characteristic of many poetical prologues, it lays before the reader a complete sketch of the plot, — thus shattering at one blow an element of dramatic art upon which authors have largely relied as a means of piquing attention by alluring it onwards in doubting suspense to some much-wished for, half-suspected *dénoûment*. Has not the poet substituted for the sacrificed plot-development something quite as alluring? Examining it more closely, this prologue will be found to possess not only the power of arousing to the utmost an interested curiosity as to what is to follow, but to contain intrinsic elements of rare fascination. It is like some finely constructed overture, which, having a distinct subject of its own, yet combines with it in a harmonious whole all the varying musical themes later to be unfolded and enriched in the body of the opera.

The grand central theme of the prologue is the worth of art as a revealer of a higher truth than lies in the fact alone. This is stated in the opening lines by means of the beautiful symbolism of the ring. The poet then proceeds to unfold about this main thought the processes of the artist-mind, from its first seizure upon the bare fact and recognition of its truth as pure gold, through the ever-deepening phases of inspiration, until the work of poetic art, by the alloy of fancy, is rounded into as perfect a shape as the exquisite ring wrought by "Castellani's imitative craft." As a means for illustrating this development of his inspiration, the poet chooses naturally enough the story found in the old yellow book which is to be the subject-

matter of the poem. In showing the growth of his own fancy about this nugget of truth, he at the same time reveals the incidents of the story, not primarily for the sake of telling it, but, by the way, as he pictures the various relations set up between the fact and fancy in this inceptive process. Thus, at the same time that we are shown into the innermost sanctum of the poet's genius, and are permitted to see the creative forces actually at work, the story is made known.

Following the development of the poet's inspiration, it is found to pass from the external to the internal. The first step in the process is the discovery of the book, and the unalloyed facts of the story are told just as they appear in it. Then, as the poet's fancy works, the characters seem to become real and living personalities to him, and he describes them as he sees them; but, although there is here revivification, the poet himself is still the visible medium between the characters in the story and the reader or listener. He must dive deeper yet; he must not only see them living before his own inner vision, he must so enter into their natures that he will be able to make them speak directly to others, himself entirely out of sight, — the artist lost in his creations.

In this manner, we are gradually led from an interest in the externalities of the plot to an interest in the personality of the characters themselves; an interest which the poet proceeds to whet by giving a sketch of those who are to reveal themselves in the future, with sufficiently tantalizing glimpses of their various points of view. The reader, by this time, is in some such state of expectation as one might be who had seen photographs of a great actor and read eulogiums upon him, and was about to experience the

reality of that which had so frequently come to him by indirections.

The multiform design sketched in the opening book unfolds its nicely adjusted parts in the remaining books in harmonious accord with this richly modulated overture.

Leaving the personal presence of the modern poet of highly developed consciousness toward the art by which his story shall take on the hue of life, the sensibilities are first made familiar with the atmosphere of the deed that was done in Seventeenth-Century Rome. We are the better prepared to reach, a little later, the quivering heart of the deed by becoming acquainted, first, in the three following books, with the three Romans who part between them all typical public opinion. The environment of the story shown in this first group of three books is essentially human and psychical. It is not at all an environment of the insensate physical sort usually studied by the scientist who investigates the causes of social phenomena. It consists in the presentation of the influence of the deed upon the contemporary Roman citizen and of the reflection of the color of his character upon the story. Through this living and breathing environment of the old Roman murder case, as if through the outer rim of some planet's atmosphere which is that planet's specific influence upon the vagues of ether about it, the poem passes on to penetrate still closer toward the true focus of the action.

In the second group of three books, therefore, the three main actors in the story successively emerge: Count Guido Franceschini, first, since he is its prime mover, yet most external and material factor; Giuseppe Caponsacchi, next, the counterforce awakened to repel his malevolent activity; and, then, Pompilia. Pas-

sivity personified, she seems, yet is the inmost effluence in the poem of subtle spiritual insight and good will, radiating her light, — as if she were indeed some central orb of whiteness, — upon Caponsacchi first, because he stands closest to her in intuitive moral rectitude, and thence diffusing even through the outer cycle of darkness where Guido writhes the resistless rays of her illumination.

The order of the poem turns outward again with the third group of three books. Is this, also, in keeping with the design? Are these learned technicalities of the two lawyers and the elaborate balancing and ethical probing of the Pope the natural sequence? Yes; for the racial impulse spoke in Pompilia's fidelity to her motherhood which dictated her escape under Caponsacchi's championship, and the institution of the family asserted its prerogative in the marital supremacy on which Guido relied to sanction his slaughter. The issue raised was a matter of social concern and affecting the moral order. The poem setting forth in quest of life and truth traces the pathway of these outgoing beams and encompasses them with their nucleus in its harmonious system. Professional equity, robed in all her ceremonial trappings, appears accordingly in the three following books. On the one side writes the husband's advocate, with pomp of legal precedent, yet in laying his personal impress on his plea speaks most vitally. On the other side, the wife's advocate upholds the moral dominion of the Law, yet fastens the interest closest where it most lay for him, upon his own oratorical ambition and dexterity. Finally, the Church herself officially assays the value of each act and claim, but, her judgment finding embodiment and instrument in the wise and aged Antonio Pignatelli, the test

of his personal experience is applied in giving sentence.

The artistic warrant for the second appearance of Guido in the succeeding book appears as an inevitable part of this interknit, socially conceived work of art. There is no word but must be made flesh and subject to diverse human scrutiny. The sentence of death, therefore, must have sentence pronounced upon it by the soul most intimate with the crime. The crowning voice of "The Ring and the Book," accordingly, is the voice of him whom society has condemned. In the eleventh book, at his eleventh hour, Guido combats the sentence and caustically arraigns civilization and religion, speaking now, fittingly, not as Count or Franceschini but without privilege of name and race, simply as the human being, — Guido. So, at the close of the book, when his doom smites his soul with sudden terror, his own lips utter the vital admission needed and supply the only fitting climax for such a poem.

The concluding book, as Epilogue, companions the opening book as Prologue. Its main office is to round out the tale. In supplementing its last occurrences, the original order is symmetrically followed in little. The Venetian traveller gives the town-talk, much as the three Roman citizens did, and provides the external report of the execution. The two lawyers appear again to furnish the social or institutional outcome and the professional glimpse of the suit for Pompilia's estate ; and the Augustinian friar stands in place of the Pope to pronounce the moral summing up in the extract from his sermon. The final words from the poet's own mouth turn again, as at the outset, upon the plan and purport of his art, and the consecration

of his work to the poet who was his wife. "Ring" is linked to "ring," the "book" lying between in the transposed words of the titles of the first and last books, "The Ring and the Book" becoming "The Book and the Ring," and the significance of the name of the poem shaping it to the end.

One other general trait of the work, which is characteristic of its evolutionary and social method, is especially ministered unto in the twelfth book. That trait is its historic quality. With Guido's cry in the ears, with the climax of the poem reached, this last book opens. Is the result that of anticlimax or redundancy? "Here were the end," says the poet, "had anything an end." As nothing has an end, there is room here for one suggestion more to that effect, and relevantly, too. An image of the fiery event resuscitated in the poem symbolizes this perpetual existency. The vivid outburst of Guido's deed is seen at its height, and then it is shown paling and dying gradually away in the vastness of the ages. The addition of the twelfth book is justified by this culminating stroke of art, revealing the central event of the poem as but an incident in the larger life of historic civilization.

This historic quality is, of course, not such as usually marks the work of the professional historian. It depends little upon exact results or patient verification of evidence. In the poem dispassionateness as well as partisanship is distrusted, and stress is put on genuineness of character as the criterion of merely relative truth. And yet a poem which is made to bear witness that human testimony is false and "fame and estimation words and wind," since it shows to the life how essential to each man is his own character and peculiar point of view, reveals more convincingly

than any but the most modern histories the interdependence and necessary coherence of all points of view; the continuous unity of the social life thence each human act emerges and whence it sinks, forever perpetuating its influence through oblivion; and the endless beauty of personal aspiration toward all that can be called "truth."

As a whole it appears, then, that, unlike most poetic plots, with definitely isolated beginnings, middles, and ends, this plot seems to be composed of continuous intersecting unfoldings, as if in concentric orbits round a centre related to all these spheres of psychical action and influence, and having outside the whole an imaginative envelope of unexplored, indefinite space.

Turning now — after this general survey of the structural design of the poem, first as projected by the poet in his prologue and then as wrought out by him in the sequence — to an examination of the characters created, it may be found that in these, too, the secret of the art with which they are portrayed consists not merely in their separate vitality but in their lifelike interrelations.

The truth to life of the first three characters is apparently meant to be more typical than personal. Yet it is easy to see the individual within the class in either Half-Rome, The Other Half-Rome, or Tertium Quid; and their double quality of generalized and individualized life is peculiarly well adapted to give the impression of a larger social atmosphere encompassing the central event, and to lead on to the more fully individualized characters of the central actors in whose persons the intensity of interest is condensed.

The typical quality of the three Roman citizens is not abstract. It does not mar their humanity. Half-

Rome buttonholes the cousin of the jackanapes who is too civil to his wife, and the reader feels the touch, too, and grows absorbed in the turn the gossip gives the story. He gathers from the whole account, however, not merely the estimate of the characters which the speaker conceives, but, also, from that, a cumulative estimate of the speaker's own character, and, thence, a still further estimate of the doubtful value of this man's evidence.

Listen next to The Other Half-Rome's version of the story; and with whatever eagerness, acquired by the habit of following the plot of incident, one may pounce upon the slight divergences in the facts between this and the preceding version, the interest in the plot of incident soon gives place to interest in the plot of character. The estimate of the characters peculiar to The Other Half-Rome's point of view first absorbs attention; then it is perceived to throw light on his own character, and finally suspicion falls upon the value of his evidence.

Where shall the real truth be found then? is the question that now dominates the reader's mood. At this stage he is ready to rush greedily upon Tertium Quid's account. His hopes are cunningly fostered by the pretence of this third speaker that now the "authoritative word" of "persons qualified to pronounce" will at last prevail above "this rabble's-brabble" of "reasonless unreasoning Rome." But no; he is only tantalized more acutely by the spiritless equipoise of Tertium Quid. Thrown back now upon a trust in his own wits as the only guide, the reader passes the poet's probation toward wisdom, and is ripe to learn what the second group of characters — the three actors in the tragedy — shall successively

impart, and with more and more intimacy of each other, themselves, and the truth.

Once having felt this threefold progressive illumination of the story, there is no end to the fascination of detailed comparison. Guido's, Caponsacchi's, and Pompilia's characters, as they appear in each man's eyes and in their own, are to be traced, contrasted, the investigation narrowed to a test by the character of each speaker as to what his special evidence on each point is worth, and crowned with a divination of how the whole coheres.

All this complexity of interest results primarily from a perception of the characters of Half-Rome, The Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid. Half-Rome is seen to be so warped by one idea that any subject he considered would wear the hated color. He cannot see true any more than Othello could, and all his mental aspirations are subject to the clumsy obtuseness and despotic cruelty of a man suspicious of the woman nature, because it is foreign to his own. It is not so important, however, that certain external circumstances be gathered about him, — namely, that he is a jealous husband who is making the telling of this story to the cousin of the "jackanapes" an excuse to cause the fellow to fear him, — as it is that the character of the man enslaved to his prejudices be seen.

The Other Half-Rome is swifter witted and more humane. He is too subtle and strategic himself not to revel in the finer powers of intuition and emotion. His nature has no distrust of the woman nature, but rather an instinctive attraction toward it. He is Violante's best defender. He excuses her first falsity, but seeing that she clears her conscience at Pompilia's expense, blames

her for confessing the lie. Some acute inkling of the relativity of truth seems to move him to put loyalty to an essential truth beyond adherence to the external truth of fact. Criticism is his foible, however, and everybody gets a taste of his dissecting blade. Even Pompilia, his adoration, the saint with the allurement of a beautiful girl, does not escape disparagement for her passivity. The "helpless, simple-sweet, or silly-sooth," he says, "how can she render service to the truth?" The poor opinion he expresses of Pompilia's intellect and will is misleading, but natural to the shrewd man who underrates the high capacity of brain and nerve necessarily accompanying experienced goodness. Otherwise, he has so sympathetically assimilated Pompilia's version of the story that his account of her penetrates closer to the heart of the matter than that of any other of the outer circles of characters. His vivisection of Guido is particularly keen and profitable to observe; and the measure of understanding he shows for Caponsacchi is not a little remarkable in view of his latent rivalry with one whom he regards as an ordinary lover.

Again, with this speaker, the mere circumstance that he is a bachelor who is romantically partial to pretty women and "the side the others are down on," is not in itself so important to observe as that with all his cleverness he is not a master of his bias.

Tertium Quid is obviously the man of pretence to social prominence and distinguished intellect. He is witty, graphic, and sophisticated; a specialist in worldliness, which qualifies him to judge as an expert in the case; but his deft reconstruction of its twists and turns feels its way, subserviently, after all, toward that neutral somewhat which will be accepted as the

"safe" view of the conservative class. The upshot of his specialistic investigation, in spite of the dexterity of its incidental episodes, is disappointing in making no point but the minor one against torture. Its main conclusion is equivocal because it has to steer its course between a disdain of "plebs, the commonalty" and a supine regard for "quality" not compatible with the unity of humanity. The actual conclusion to be drawn is that horror of the "mob" is the main dependence to prove superiority over it. At the impotent close of the deft harangue, when "Excellency" and "Highness" show themselves human enough to be bored by much talk to no purpose, they fare no better than "plebs" in Tertium Quid's eyes, and he styles them, between his teeth, "the two idiots here." The reader is led to cap his conclusion with another, remembering the gage offered at the start —

> "if I fail —
> Favored with such an audience, understand! —
> To set things right, why, class me with the mob
> As understander of the mind of man!"

Here again, then, with Tertium Quid, as with the two other typical Roman citizens, it is important not merely to perceive the character but judge the pretensions, and, balancing the two, see how much the evidence is worth.

Flattering clouds of suffering and manly self-confidence half obscure Guido's genuine self upon his first appearance. A flood of daylight pours upon him on his second. To know the secret of his character, and lay the true stress upon its relation to the story, appeal must be made here, from the Count presumed innocent to Guido found guilty. Holding in abey-

ance, then, the first plea of Count Guido Franceschini, it may be compared better with his final utterances later, when nothing intervenes between the man and death.

A peculiar interest attaches to Caponsacchi, because he alone of all the personages that revolve about the central tragedy suffers the tortures of a severe moral struggle. His soul is first awakened by Pompilia, whose sudden influence works a revolution in his character, and sows the seeds of a development only curtailed by his inevitable priestly bias. All the onlookers agree in describing him as a mixture of priest and courtly gallant, — vowed to the Church, yet a favorite in the social world.

Under these circumstances it is hardly to be wondered at that no one, not even sympathetic Other Half-Rome, can believe in his entire innocence and self-disinterestedness in rendering aid to Pompilia. Sympathy for the outraged honor of Guido blinds Half-Rome to every other consideration; but the rest of the world is more ready to condone the sin of the priest than to believe him guiltless. This widespread feeling is reflected in the paltering decision of the court, — not to exonerate him, but to deal him a light punishment. What could world or law-court know of the powerful forces latent within the character of the worldling priest, or of the influence for good of a personality so intuitively strong as that of the youthful Pompilia! Only when Caponsacchi comes to tell his own story is the real truth of the matter discoverable. The vision of Pompilia with her "beautiful sad strange smile" was his first true revelation; her face became for him "God's own smile," and he realized there were greater possibilities in life and in religion

than he had ever dreamed of. Henceforth the frivolous side of his life became utterly distasteful to him, and the perception of his duties as a priest deepened. Conscious that his awakening was due to his sudden recognition in Pompilia of a purity of soul he had never before experienced, his trust in her was so complete that he at once saw through the diabolical plan of Guido to entrap Pompilia and himself. So strong a nature as his, once aroused to an understanding of the seriousness of duty, would be apt to verge toward fanaticism. He would confuse the duty to his earth-made vows with a larger divine duty, especially in an age when religious sentiment placed more emphasis upon the performance of the letter of the vow than upon keeping the spirit of it intact. Only so can his hesitancy, when Pompilia appealed to him for aid, be explained. His struggle was threefold, and wavered between a human desire to help Pompilia, a desire to live up to the new ideal of duty born within him by Pompilia herself, and a desire truly to sacrifice himself. This last, he concludes, can best be accomplished by withstanding the great wish of his heart to help Pompilia, — a conclusion which, combined with his desire to be true to his vows, causes him to decide to leave her in God's hands. Another visit to Pompilia makes him understand that he himself must be God's instrument. He accepts the charge somewhat in the spirit of Prometheus, who "freely sinned." His only sin, however, was against the external laws of the Church. He cherished faithfully the spirit of his vows, not only because he must be true to his new-born ideals, but because such action constituted the highest homage he could offer Pompilia. He dares hardly acknowledge even to himself his love for

her, largely because he cannot throw off entirely the priestly attitude which takes for granted an antagonism between an earthly love and the love of the Church. Though he pictures the possibilities of a life outside the Church, and made sacred by her presence, he does not let himself recognize that in such love as existed between them there is a divine element transcending all earthly vows, and destined to have its fulfilment in eternity. Earth might have had such bliss in store for him: it is lost forever, and duty demands that he shall not even regret the loss.

"So I from such communion pass content."

But his heart asserts itself, and human anguish forces from him the cry, —

"O great, just, good God! Miserable me!"

He is indeed a Prometheus, but a Prometheus still in chains.

His speech is a masterpiece of dramatic writing, reflecting to the life his complex feelings. Scorn for the lawyers, whom he scores mercilessly for their miserable failure in the guardianship of Pompilia, when he who might have been of use to her was facetiously adjudged a "merry" punishment for what they persisted in regarding a youthful escapade; loathing of Guido; anguish at the news of Pompilia's death intensifying his love for her; but against any expression of which he strives fiercely, lest it might detract from the perfect sum of her purity, — and underneath all these rending human passions, the struggle of the priest to maintain his priesthood unsullied.

There was a law in force in the ancient Hindu drama, that no actor could come upon the stage before

some reference had been made to him by actors already on the stage. The effectiveness of such a method Browning has certainly proved in "The Ring and the Book." The reader is in a fever-heat of expectation when Pompilia is finally introduced in her own person; and that the poet has succeeded in making her not only fulfil expectation, but surprise us with her transcendent loveliness, is alone proof of his masterly genius. She has appeared, through the medium of the speakers, in the preceding monologues in the likeness, at one extreme, of a light, frivolous, even depraved girl; at the other, in that of a martyred saint, according as individual bias misunderstands and hates her, or comprehends and reverentially loves her. Guido's brutal attitude toward her as his wife is too evident for his account of her to gain any credence whatever; yet, in spite of himself, there are references to her in his speech which give glimpses of her true character, just as if her nature were so powerful a centre of truth that it must perforce shine through the foulest aspersions of her. Even Half-Rome's opinion of her does not appear to be based upon an overwhelming conviction of her guilt, but rather upon the determination to uphold the rights of the husband at any cost. Did Half-Rome forget himself for the moment, when he presents so finely the picture of Pompilia trapped at Castelnuovo?

> "Her defence? This. She woke, saw, sprang upright
> I' the midst, and stood as terrible as truth."

Such passages have been considered a lapse from Half-Rome into Browning. But if Half-Rome be conceived to base his arguments on prejudice, rather than conviction, it will be easy to imagine him carried

away, for the moment, by the splendid pluck of Pompilia, and falling into this sudden show of sympathy. This is made all the more plausible by the way he brings himself up with a round turn, —

> "But facts are facts, and flinch not; stubborn things,
> And the question, how comes my purse
> I' the poke of you? admits of no reply."

If glimpses are caught, from time to time, of Pompilia as she really is, even from her enemies, it is equally true that her friends do not give an entire view of her character. We saw how The Other Half-Rome regarded her, so "silly-sooth" that she could hardly be expected to shed any light on the bare justice of the situation. It may be questioned whether Caponsacchi recognized to the full the greatness of her character, although he had felt the influence of her personality, — one that convinced, not by argument, but by her presence, as Walt Whitman would say. He certainly did not understand, in their essence, the principles that guided her, or he would not have suffered her to languish a day longer than she need for help, while he settled upon the action best for his own soul.

There is no moral struggle in Pompilia's short life, such as that in Caponsacchi's. Both were alike in the fact that up to a certain point in their lives their full consciousness was unawakened: hers slept, through innocence and ignorance; his, in spite of knowledge, through lack of aspiration. She was rudely awakened by suffering; he by the sudden revelation of a possible ideal. Therefore, while for him, conscious of his past failures, a struggle begins; for her, conscious of no failure in her duty, which she had always followed

according to her light, there simply continues duty according to the new light. Neither archbishop nor friendly "smiles and shakes of head" could weaken her conviction that, being estranged in soul from her husband, her attitude toward him was inevitable. No qualms of conscience trouble her as to her inalienable right to fly from him. That she submitted as long as she did, was only because no one could be found to aid her. And how quick and certain her defence of Caponsacchi, threatened by Guido, when he overtakes them at the Inn! As she thinks over it calmly afterwards, she makes no apology, but justifies her action as the voice of God.

> "If I sinned so,—never obey voice more
> O' the Just and Terrible, who bids us 'Bear!'
> Not—'Stand by; bear to see my angels bear!'"

The gossip over her flight with Caponsacchi does not trouble her as it does him. He saved her in her great need; the supposition that their motives for flight had any taint of impurity in them is too puerile to be given a thought, yet with the same sublime certainty of the right, characteristic of her, she acknowledges, at the end, her love for Caponsacchi, and looks for its fulfilment in the future when marriage shall be an interpenetration of souls that know themselves into one. Having attained so great a good, she can wish none of the evil she has suffered undone. She goes a step farther. Not only does she accept her own suffering for the sake of the final supreme good to herself, but she feels assured that good will fall at last to those who worked the evil.

Of all the characters portrayed by Browning in this poem, Pompilia is the only one, not even excepting

the good old Pope, who has absolutely clear vision. She stands as the embodiment of that higher law which works behind all narrow-minded conceptions of duty; she grasps the relations of evil to good in the world, and her large charity makes room for even her arch-enemy in the healing shadow of God. Withal she is so human and lovable. Though her philosophy is profound, it breaks so spontaneously and simply from her lips that it does not give the impression of being the result of intellectual pondering, but is like the natural outflow of a mind that had reached a higher plane of consciousness than those about her.

The sole point in which her feeling appears slightly to darken her perception is with regard to Caponsacchi, of whose moral struggle she does not seem to be aware, for she attributes to him the same intuitive vision possessed by herself. His own account and hers of his reply to her when she "called him to her and he came" is a striking example of this. He says, "It shall be when it can be." She makes him say simply, "I am yours." It is quite possible, however, that she knew his inmost soul better than he did himself, and caught its meaning rather than his words. Pompilia's conception of him is perhaps the true Caponsacchi, while in his account of himself we get Caponsacchi entangled in a mesh woven of inherited convention. May we not venture to imagine that Pompilia's dying message to him at last set him free, and that, henceforth, he would acknowledge and accept a present and future for their two souls of love infinitely exalted, nor any longer look back upon an unrealized earthly love?

After the intense concentration of emotion in these two monologues, the speeches of the two lawyers furnish a relief that may be compared to the effect of a

Shakespearian scene in which the "base mechanicals" figure. De Archangelis and Bottinius are not much more profound in their reasoning than Bottom the weaver, but their poverty in wisdom is bolstered up by an immense deal more of learning and an intellectual cunning in the use of it which produces at least a "swashing outside." To them a murder case is just so much grist for the legal mill. The desire to find the truth and have justice rendered is no part of their programme. The ambition of each is to gain his case and outwit his opponent by building up a defence on some legal quibble. There is not a more brilliant example of searching sarcasm in literature than in the portrayal of this brace of lawyers, hitting not only at these easily recognizable types, but at the institution of law itself, as at present constituted.

The pettifogging soul of De Archangelis warms to the task of proving a guilty man justified in his guilt. He is quite invincible when marshalling his forces of precedent, provided it first be admitted that citations of precedent constitute argument; but, if driven to rely on his own reasoning powers for a point, he flounders pitifully. Yet we cannot altogether despise this representative of the law, because of his absorbing interest in his little son, whom he must have loved devotedly if there is any truth in the quaint little German saying, "Much-loved children have many names." One suspects that some of his inanities in argument may have been due to his abstraction over the coming birthday feast.

The egotism of De Archangelis pales before that of Bottinius picturing himself, — the centre of admiring judges and audience, — while he paints with artist-hand a true picture of the sainted Pompilia. His

method of presenting the truth is to imagine Pompilia and Caponsacchi guilty of lower depths of moral depravity than even Guido could have accused them of; and then to try to justify his interpretation of their actions by defending Pompilia on the ground that she committed small sins to save Guido from a greater sin; and Caponsacchi on the ground that he followed out natural tendencies. Bottinius has the instincts of a criminal lawyer, and when given a case where the evidence proves too easily the innocence of his client, his ingenuity must find vent in arguing white, black, and then whitewashing the blackness he has himself created. At the end he has evidently convinced himself, if no one else, that all the calumnies he was only going to imagine true are indeed true, and that he has succeeded in glossing them over so as to make them appear virtues. Then, with an effrontery that reveals the depths of his moral obliquity, he declares that he has, through painting Pompilia's virtue, proved Guido's crime. Pompilia's confession almost upsets his devious methods of proving her purity; but he is equal to the occasion and declares it a lie which adds one more grace to her character, — the grace of perjuring herself to save Guido's soul.

The character of the "good old Pope" is somewhat difficult to analyze, since he seems to be a composite of two historical popes, Innocent XI. and Innocent XII., combined with a special individuality, created for him by Browning, made up of mental traits quite consistent with the time, and others which belong to the nineteenth century, if not peculiarly to Browning himself.

Taking him as we find him, sprung fully endowed from the brain of the poet, he is pre-eminently a man

actuated by the most sincere desire to find the truth and deal out justice, and in his earnest dignity furnishes a refreshing contrast to the shallow lawyers.

He is, however, human, and feels the necessity of assuring himself that the safety of his own soul will not be jeopardized by his decision to condemn to death Guido and his associates. He states a profound truth when he decides that God will look upon the sincerity of his intention, even should he in his human ignorance make a mistake.

There are no finer passages in the poem than those in which he renders his judgments upon the various actors in the tragedy. With terrible keenness of vision he dissects Guido's motives, — his avarice, his deceit out of which all his crimes grew. Yet even here the fallibility of the human mind asserts itself. Though he shows the most exquisite appreciation of Pompilia, and recognizes her intuitive perception of the higher law, he does not quite realize whither this intuitive faculty carried her. He commends her for her submission to her husband until the higher duty of motherhood bade her rebel, evidently unconscious that she never acknowledged any obedience to Guido, but simply submitted because circumstances forced her to do so. Pompilia, herself, is careful to make this plain when she says, —

> "Now understand here, by no means mistake!
> Long ago had I tried to leave that house."

He passes over also her confession of love for Caponsacchi, which it seems hardly probable he would approve if he had noticed it, since he considered one of Caponsacchi's chief glories the withstanding of the temptation to love Pompilia. He also admires Capon-

sacchi for his "Championship of God, at first blush," when he sprang to rescue Pompilia. He is quite oblivious of the fact that Caponsacchi took some time to decide whether he would not be obeying the voice of God to more purpose if he did not rescue the "martyr-maiden." The enthusiasm of the Pope for these two really blinds him a little to the realities of the case, and results in his admiring them both, especially for something they did not do. The inconsistencies which may arise from a recognition of truth in conflict with obedience to convention is shown when the Pope, in spite of his admiration for Caponsacchi, would have him punished because he broke the laws of the Church. These are the touches which place the Pope along with the other characters of the book as a really dramatic portraiture, while his grief at the lust for gold he everywhere discovers suits well enough with the historical accounts of Innocent XII., whose energies were spent in trying to reform abuses growing out of the selfish scramble for wealth rife at that time. But when the Pope philosophizes upon the basis of his faith, upon evil and doubt, he takes a long leap forward. Going beyond that eighteenth century, which the poet makes him look forward to as an age of revivifying doubt destined to give birth to a new faith, he reveals in his own convictions what that new faith will become in the nineteenth century, namely, a belief in a personal revelation of divine love to every individual.

There is a curious difference between Guido's first monologue and his second one. His character must necessarily appear in both. Why is it truer in the last? In both he assumes various plausible shapes, and lays claim to heroism, but reveals the skulking

soul. When the two messengers enter, as earlier when he addressed his judges, his first impulse is to ingratiate himself by a flattery of rank that will serve to insinuate his own claim to social privilege. After he has heard why they come to him and what message they bring him from the Pope, then it is as if some outer bodily integument which he had himself supposed, until now, to be a veritable part of him, slipped away, and left his inner nature intact and able to betray itself more clearly. Guido's truth to himself flares out, now that life must leave him, with a sudden fierce perception of the life still within him, that has made him what he was and now makes him strong to answer the Pope's sentence — "'Be thou not!' by 'Thus I am!'" The best possible explanation of the criminal is — In my crime spoke my nature. His best possible justification for reading his own nature into all other men's natures is the warrant they themselves give him to do so. Half-Rome has substantially the same theory of society and marriage as that on which Guido based his life and justified his slaughter. So has Bottinius and Tertium Quid. Guido, in his first smooth, deferential monologue, rested his confidence in his safety on this plea: I am a loyal servant of Church and Law, a pillar of society! "Absolve thou me, law's mere executant!" Through me bring in force again the wholesome household rule —

> "Husbands once more God's representative,
> Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
> No longer men of Belial."

In his last speech, this pretence of serving "public weal, which hangs to the law, which holds by the Church," having been knocked from under him by

the stroke of his death-sentence, he falls back merely on his own nature. The stealthy cunning lashes out into unbridled ferocity. The tiger-cat that "whined before, and pried and tried and trod so gingerly" has done with useless wariness and openly attacks first the Church he served, and then the Civilization and Society for which he finds he risked his head. Capable for an instant, at least, of conceiving "a careless courage as to consequences," and of exercising sincerely a curiosity that bids him turn over and over again the theories he acted on to see the true reason for his failure, the real Guido arouses a new interest. The character, supposed to be merely mean and tricky, shows an inherent self inside the mask. An element of grandeur appears in the hard consistency and implacable heart with which this self-styled victim of Society arraigns the judgment he falls beneath. If his helplessness stir a thrill of pathos finally, the art of the poet will have finished its vital reconstruction and redeemed the villain in Guido to human brotherliness.

Nobles and men of power make common cause, against the unconsidered mass of men, to gain unharmed their pleasure. This is one of Guido's first principles. "Manly men" who own a wife hold their right "with tooth and nail." This is another of Guido's first principles. They suffice to show him his innocence. Right as an abstract conception or a moral test has not occurred to him. A right as a privilege exercised by whosoever has title, wealth, or strength, he understands and illustrates in the story of Felice. There were Popes then, too, he maintains; not such as this one. "Why do things change? Wherefore is Rome un-Romed?" Guido accuses Society of moral progress, without knowing what

moral progress means, and condemns it, like any other grumbler who suffers from a change, for the newness of its virtue. He considers it a pretence, of course, — a fall from grace in Gospel and in Law, — and blames himself merely for the blunder of calculating that their action would be consistent.

To this nature, arrogating his time-honored right to rule by force or guile those he counts his creatures, Pompilia speaks for the new individual right the one effective word. The leaven of her "self-possession to the uttermost" is shown at its work in Guido's account of her as the stumbling-block in his path. Not Caponsacchi himself has gained so adequate a conception as Guido has of Pompilia's forceless strength.

Guido's ugly picture of his relations toward his son supplies the right contrast to make the beauty of Pompilia's motherliness more convincing. His notion of fatherhood falls before her influence as fell his notions of citizenship and husbandhood. The contrast is not merely pointed between recreant fatherhood and noble motherliness: it symbolizes the good and evil social influences this wife and husband represent. Of this Guido is unaware, but he lays his defeat to Pompilia; and through her, by means of the push of her influence upon him, on Caponsacchi, on the Pope, and on the Pope's sentence, his whole conception of life begins at last to quake.

At the climax of the poem, through the revelation of Guido's nature, the two forces stand in open opposition. If something come now to check Guido's voluble rhetoric, shrivel through the human testimony and disclose the human fact, if the Pope's sentence — Pompilia's instrument — complete the moral battle-

shock between the two, and hurl Guido on from the perception of blunder to a feeling of need, one cry of trust in the strength of human goodness will be enough to proclaim its triumph over human evil. It comes, —

> "God, . . .
> Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"

In characterizing Guido thus, the poet has brought the entire plot of tragic incident, interwoven character, and dramatically expressed moral motive to a focus.

The style of "The Ring and the Book" is singularly clear, in spite of the colloquialisms, archaisms, historical and classical allusions, and Latin phrases that abound. If they were judged as belonging to the whole poem, and that were considered as if it were a single subjective utterance, they might make it seem uncouth. But if they be referred to their appropriate places in the course of the talk of the various characters, whose monologues constitute the story, they will readily reveal their fitness in a work that blends the traits of poem, drama, and novel. Colloquialisms, for instance, in the speech of such worldly townsmen as are here presented, obviously belong to any vital transcription of everyday talk. It may be a question how far a modern poet is justified in counting upon the use of obsolete and archaic English words to breathe an Italian seventeenth-century aroma. However that may be, it is evidently an intention that accounts for them. Such historical allusions as appear in the frequent mention of Molinism seem intended, also, to add their minute touch to the effect of a historical environment about this particular event in the life of Rome, which

Browning sought to give, as already indicated, by placing an outer circle of characters about his central group. The classical allusions mainly appear in the monologues of speakers with some pretence to the pagan scholarship Italy had loved from the days of the Renaissance. It is amusing to see Half-Rome ape this gentlemanly habit and leave a blank in his speech, through an attempt to decorate it with still another pagan god whose name fails him. Bottinius and Guido are more apt. The recurrence of favorite allusions perhaps marks a literary custom of the time, which Browning's reading had noted. The pomp of Latin to which their profession obliges the lawyers is so whimsical, as well as fitting, that finding fault with it is graceless criticism, the more so, since the poet has made his base professionals give a humorous free-hand English version which, while it doubly delights the Latinist, does not leave the English reader in the dark.

Lyric outbursts of exquisite beauty occur only where the mood befits them, when the speaker is noble in character and stirred to a high devotion. The dedicatory lines to "Lyric Love," passages put in Caponsacchi's mouth, and much of Pompilia's utterance, move to this smoother music. Again, in Guido's second monologue, there is a savage directness almost lurid with dramatic force, or there is an impulsive throbbing delicacy in Caponsacchi's outflow, or on the Pope's lips a brooding sereneness. Everywhere the fluent diversity is subject to the beck of the dramatic wand. When the lines are obviously personal, as in those to "Lyric Love," at the close of the first book, addressed to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, there is an exalted aloofness about them

befitting the ideal love of the poem as well as the rare human love of the two English poets, and the personal note touched here and again, at the close of the twelfth book, is suitably joined to the artistic design of the work by means of the ring metaphor.

The work as a whole has been accused of inordinate length. Closer study of it may show that every word is needed for the proper elaboration of the characters. It has been claimed, too, that some one or other of the characters might be spared, but even after those to spare had been agreed upon, a fuller consideration might reveal that all, without exception, fall into the places intended for them, and that on their interlacing support grows the design which distinguishes the poem.

CHARLOTTE PORTER.
HELEN A. CLARKE.

May 11, 1897.

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THE

RING AND THE BOOK.

1868–9.

[Book I. places the plan of the poem before the reader, and shows how the purpose of the poet is to transmute by the intermingling of fancy with crude fact, a dry record of events into a work of art, and thereby gain a more universal truth than lies in the fact alone. The finished product of art is symbolized as the Ring; the crude fact is found in the old yellow Book from which first a bare sketch of the story is given. Next, the poet sketches the story as he imagines it after his fancy has clothed the characters with living objective personality. This is symbolized as the ring with the alloy of fancy added that it may be fashioned into shape. Still it needs the final spirt of acid to carry off the alloy, leaving only the refashioned truth. This will be accomplished by bringing all the characters on the scene to tell their own stories. The poet himself will disappear, but the effects of his fancy will be revealed in the fashioning of the characters. Thus to the truth of fact is added the vitalizing truth of art.]

I.

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

Do you see this Ring?
'T is Rome-work, made to match
(By Castellani's imitative craft)
Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,
After a dropping April; found alive

Spark-like 'mid unearthed slope-side figtree-roots
That roof old tombs at Chiusi: soft, you see,
Yet crisp as jewel-cutting. There 's one trick,
(Craftsmen instruct me) one approved device
And but one, fits such slivers of pure gold
As this was, — such mere oozings from the mine,
Virgin as oval tawny pendent tear
At beehive-edge when ripened combs o'erflow, —
To bear the file's tooth and the hammer's tap:
Since hammer needs must widen out the round,
And file emboss it fine with lily-flowers,
Ere the stuff grow a ring-thing right to wear.
That trick is, the artificer melts up wax
With honey, so to speak; he mingles gold
With gold's alloy, and, duly tempering both,
Effects a manageable mass, then works:
But his work ended, once the thing a ring,
Oh, there 's repristination! Just a spirt
O' the proper fiery acid o'er its face,
And forth the alloy unfastened flies in fume;
While, self-sufficient now, the shape remains,
The rondure brave, the lilied loveliness,
Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore:
Prime nature with an added artistry —
No carat lost, and you have gained a ring.
What of it? 'T is a figure, a symbol, say;
A thing's sign: now for the thing signified.

Do you see this square old yellow Book, I toss
I' the air, and catch again, and twirl about
By the crumpled vellum covers, — pure crude fact
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since?
Examine it yourselves! I found this book,

Gave a *lira* for it, eightpence English just,
(Mark the predestination!) when a Hand,
Always above my shoulder, pushed me once,
One day still fierce 'mid many a day struck calm,
Across a Square in Florence, crammed with booths,
Buzzing and blaze, noontide and market-time,
Toward Baccio's marble, — ay, the basement-ledge
O' the pedestal where sits and menaces
John of the Black Bands with the upright spear,
'Twixt palace and church, — Riccardi where they lived,
His race, and San Lorenzo where they lie.
This book, — precisely on that palace-step
Which, meant for lounging knaves o' the Medici,
Now serves re-venders to display their ware, —
'Mongst odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames
White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,
Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests,
(Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade)
Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,
Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry
Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts
In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised!)
A wreck of tapestry, proudly-purposed web
When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,
Now offered as a mat to save bare feet
(Since carpets constitute a cruel cost)
Treading the chill scagliola bedward: then
A pile of brown-etched prints, two *crazie* each,
Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth
— Sowing the Square with works of one and the same
Master, the imaginative Sienese
Great in the scenic backgrounds — (name and fame
None of you know, nor does he fare the worse:)
From these . . . Oh, with a Lionard going cheap

If it should prove, as promised, that Joconde
Whereof a copy contents the Louvre! — these
I picked this book from. Five compeers in flank
Stood left and right of it as tempting more —
A dogseared Spicilegium, the fond tale
O' the Frail One of the Flower, by young Dumas,
Vulgarized Horace for the use of schools,
The Life, Death, Miracles of Saint Somebody,
Saint Somebody Else, his Miracles, Death and Life, —
With this, one glance at the lettered back of which,
And "Stall!" cried I: a *lira* made it mine.

Here it is, this I toss and take again;
Small-quarto size, part print part manuscript:
A book in shape but, really, pure crude fact
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since.
Give it me back! The thing 's restorative
I' the touch and sight.

That memorable day,
(June was the month, Lorenzo named the Square)
I leaned a little and overlooked my prize
By the low railing round the fountain-source
Close to the statue, where a step descends:
While clinked the cans of copper, as stooped and rose
Thick-ankled girls who brimmed them, and made place
For marketmen glad to pitch basket down,
Dip a broad melon-leaf that holds the wet,
And whisk their faded fresh. And on I read
Presently, though my path grew perilous
Between the outspread straw-work, piles of plait
Soon to be flapping, each o'er two black eyes
And swathe of Tuscan hair, on festas fine:

Through fire-irons, tribes of tongs, shovels in sheaves,
Skeleton bedsteads, wardrobe-drawers agape,
Rows of tall slim brass lamps with dangling gear, —
And worse, cast clothes a-sweetening in the sun :
None of them took my eye from off my prize.
Still read I on, from written title-page
To written index, on, through street and street,
At the Strozzi, at the Pillar, at the Bridge ;
Till, by the time I stood at home again
In Casa Guidi by Felice Church,
Under the doorway where the black begins
With the first stone-slab of the staircase cold,
I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth
Gathered together, bound up in this book,
Print three-fifths, written supplement the rest.
"*Romana Homicidiorum*" — nay,
Better translate — "A Roman murder-case :
Position of the entire criminal cause
Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
With certain Four the cutthroats in his pay,
Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death
By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
At Rome on February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight :
Wherein it is disputed if, and when,
Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape
The customary forfeit."

Word for word,
So ran the title-page : murder, or else
Legitimate punishment of the other crime,
Accounted murder by mistake, — just that
And no more, in a Latin cramp enough
When the law had her eloquence to launch,

But interfilleted with Italian streaks
When testimony stooped to mother-tongue, —
That, was this old square yellow book about.

Now, as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,
Lay gold, (beseech you, hold that figure fast!)
So, in this book lay absolutely truth,
Fanciless fact, the documents indeed,
Primary lawyer-pleadings for, against,
The aforesaid Five ; real summed-up circumstance
Adduced in proof of these on either side,
Put forth and printed, as the practice was,
At Rome, in the Apostolic Chamber's type,
And so submitted to the eye o' the Court
Presided over by His Reverence
Rome's Governor and Criminal Judge, — the trial
Itself, to all intents, being then as now
Here in the book and nowise out of it ;
Seeing, there properly was no judgment-bar,
No bringing of accuser and accused,
And whoso judged both parties, face to face
Before some court, as we conceive of courts.
There was a Hall of Justice ; that came last :
For Justice had a chamber by the hall
Where she took evidence first, summed up the same,
Then sent accuser and accused alike,
In person of the advocate of each,
To weigh its worth, thereby arrange, array
The battle. 'T was the so-styled Fisc began,
Pleaded (and since he only spoke in print
The printed voice of him lives now as then)
The public Prosecutor — "Murder's proved ;
With five . . . what we call qualities of bad,
Worse, worst, and yet worse still, and still worse yet ;

Crest over crest crowning the cockatrice,
That beggar hell's regalia to enrich
Count Guido Franceschini : punish him ! ''
Thus was the paper put before the court
In the next stage, (no noisy work at all,)
To study at ease. In due time like reply
Came from the so-styled Patron of the Poor,
Official mouthpiece of the five accused
Too poor to fee a better, — Guido's luck
Or else his fellows', — which, I hardly know, —
An outbreak as of wonder at the world,
A fury-fit of outraged innocence,
A passion of betrayed simplicity :
" Punish Count Guido ? For what crime, what hint
O' the color of a crime, inform us first !
Reward him rather ! Recognize, we say,
In the deed done, a righteous judgment dealt!
All conscience and all courage, — there 's our Count
Charactered in a word ; and, what 's more strange,
He had companionship in privilege,
Found four courageous conscientious friends:
Absolve, applaud all five, as props of law,
Sustainers of society ! — perchance
A trifle over-hasty with the hand
To hold her tottering ark, had tumbled else ;
But that 's a splendid fault whereat we wink,
Wishing your cold correctness sparkled so ! ''
Thus paper second followed paper first,
Thus did the two join issue — nay, the four,
Each pleader having an adjunct. " True, he killed
— So to speak — in a certain sort — his wife,
But laudably, since thus it happed!'' quoth one :
Whereat, more witness and the case postponed.
" Thus it happed not, since thus he did the deed,

And proved himself thereby portentousest
Of cutthroats and a prodigy of crime,
As the woman that he slaughtered was a saint,
Martyr and miracle!" quoth the other to match:
Again, more witness, and the case postponed.
"A miracle, ay — of lust and impudence;
Hear my new reasons!" interposed the first:
"— Coupled with more of mine!" pursued his peer.
"Beside, the precedents, the authorities!"
From both at once a cry with an echo, that!
That was a firebrand at each fox's tail
Unleashed in a cornfield: soon spread flare enough,
As hurtled thither and there heaped themselves
From earth's four corners, all authority
And precedent for putting wives to death,
Or letting wives live, sinful as they seem.
How legislated, now, in this respect,
Solon and his Athenians? Quote the code
Of Romulus and Rome! Justinian speak!
Nor modern Baldo, Bartolo be dumb!
The Roman voice was potent, plentiful;
Cornelia de Sicariis hurried to help
Pompeia de Parricidiis; Julia de
Something-or-other jostled *Lex* this-and-that;
King Solomon confirmed Apostle Paul:
That nice decision of Dolabella, eh?
That pregnant instance of Theodoric, oh!
Down to that choice example Ælian gives
(An instance I find much insisted on)
Of the elephant who, brute-beast though he were,
Yet understood and punished on the spot
His master's naughty spouse and faithless friend;
A true tale which has edified each child,
Much more shall flourish favored by our court!

Pages of proof this way, and that way proof,
And always — once again the case postponed.
Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month,
— Only on paper, pleadings all in print,
Nor ever was, except i' the brains of men,
More noise by word of mouth than you hear now —
Till the court cut all short with "Judged, your cause.
Receive our sentence! Praise God! We pronounce
Count Guido devilish and damnable:
His wife Pompilia in thought, word and deed,
Was perfect pure, he murdered her for that:
As for the Four who helped the One, all Five —
Why, let employer and hirelings share alike
In guilt and guilt's reward, the death their due!"

So was the trial at end, do you suppose?
"Guilty you find him, death you doom him to?
Ay, were not Guido, more than needs, a priest,
Priest and to spare!" — this was a shot reserved;
I learn this from epistles which begin
Here where the print ends, — see the pen and ink
Of the advocate, the ready at a pinch! —
"My client boasts the clerkly privilege,
Has taken minor orders many enough,
Shows still sufficient chrism upon his pate
To neutralize a blood-stain: *presbyter*,
Primæ tonsuræ, *subdiaconus*,
Sacerdos, so he slips from underneath
Your power, the temporal, slides inside the robe
Of mother Church: to her we make appeal
By the Pope, the Church's head!"

A parlous plea,
Put in with noticeable effect, it seems;

"Since straight," — resumes the zealous orator,
Making a friend acquainted with the facts, —
"Once the word 'clericality' let fall,
Procedure stopped and freer breath was drawn
By all considerate and responsible Rome."
Quality took the decent part, of course;
Held by the husband, who was noble too:
Or, for the matter of that, a churl would side
With too-refined susceptibility,
And honor which, tender in the extreme,
Stung to the quick, must roughly right itself
At all risks, not sit still and whine for law
As a Jew would, if you squeezed him to the wall,
Brisk-trotting through the Ghetto. Nay, it seems,
Even the Emperor's Envoy had his say
To say on the subject; might not see, unmoved,
Civility menaced throughout Christendom
By too harsh measure dealt her champion here.
Lastly, what made all safe, the Pope was kind,
From his youth up, reluctant to take life,
If mercy might be just and yet show grace;
Much more unlikely then, in extreme age,
To take a life the general sense bade spare.
'T was plain that Guido would go scatheless yet.

But human promise, oh, how short of shine!
How topple down the piles of hope we rear!
How history proves . . . nay, read Herodotus!
Suddenly starting from a nap, as it were,
A dog-sleep with one shut, one open orb,
Cried the Pope's great self, — Innocent by name
And nature too, and eighty-six years old,
Antonio Pignatelli of Naples, Pope
Who had trod many lands, known many deeds,

Probed many hearts, beginning with his own,
And now was far in readiness for God, —
'T was he who first bade leave those souls in peace,
Those Jansenists, re-nicknamed Molinists,
('Gainst whom the cry went, like a frowsy tune,
Tickling men's ears — the sect for a quarter of an hour
I' the teeth of the world which, clown-like, loves to chew
Be it but a straw 'twixt work and whistling-while,
Taste some vituperation, bite away,
Whether at marjoram-sprig or garlic-clove,
Aught it may sport with, spoil, and then spit forth)
"Leave them alone," bade he, "those Molinists!
Who may have other light than we perceive,
Or why is it the whole world hates them thus?"
Also he peeled off that last scandal-rag
Of Nepotism; and so observed the poor
That men would merrily say, "Halt, deaf and blind,
Who feed on fat things, leave the master's self
To gather up the fragments of his feast,
These be the nephews of Pope Innocent! —
His own meal costs but five carlines a day,
Poor-priest's allowance, for he claims no more."
— He cried of a sudden, this great good old Pope,
When they appealed in last resort to him,
"I have mastered the whole matter: I nothing doubt.
Though Guido stood forth priest from head to heel,
Instead of, as alleged, a piece of one, —
And further, were he, from the tonsured scalp
To the sandaled sole of him, my son and Christ's,
Instead of touching us by finger-tip
As you assert, and pressing up so close
Only to set a blood-smutch on our robe, —
I and Christ would renounce all right in him.
Am I not Pope, and presently to die,

And busied how to render my account,
And shall I wait a day ere I decide
On doing or not doing justice here?
Cut off his head to-morrow by this time,
Hang up his four mates, two on either hand,
And end one business more!"

So said, so done —
Rather so writ, for the old Pope bade this,
I find, with his particular chirograph,
His own no such infirm hand, Friday night;
And next day, February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight,
— Not at the proper head-and-hanging-place
On bridge-foot close by Castle Angelo,
Where custom somewhat staled the spectacle,
('T was not so well i' the way of Rome, beside,
The noble Rome, the Rome of Guido's rank)
But at the city's newer gayer end, —
The cavalcading promenading place
Beside the gate and opposite the church
Under the Pincian gardens green with Spring,
'Neath the obelisk 'twixt the fountains in the Square,
Did Guido and his fellows find their fate,
All Rome for witness, and — my writer adds —
Remonstrant in its universal grief,
Since Guido had the suffrage of all Rome.

This is the bookful; thus far take the truth,
The untempered gold, the fact untampered with,
The mere ring-metal ere the ring be made!
And what has hitherto come of it? Who preserves
The memory of this Guido, and his wife
Pompilia, more than Ademollo's name,

The etcher of those prints, two *crazie* each,
Saved by a stone from snowing broad the Square
With scenic backgrounds? Was this truth of force?
Able to take its own part as truth should,
Sufficient, self-sustaining? Why, if so —
Yonder's a fire, into it goes my book,
As who shall say me nay, and what the loss?
You know the tale already: I may ask,
Rather than think to tell you, more thereof, —
Ask you not merely who were he and she,
Husband and wife, what manner of mankind,
But how you hold concerning this and that
Other yet-unnamed actor in the piece.
The young frank handsome courtly Canon, now,
The priest, declared the lover of the wife,
He who, no question, did elope with her,
For certain bring the tragedy about,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi; — his strange course
I' the matter, was it right or wrong or both?
Then the old couple, slaughtered with the wife
By the husband as accomplices in crime,
Those Comparini, Pietro and his spouse, —
What say you to the right or wrong of that,
When, at a known name whispered through the door
Of a lone villa on a Christmas night,
It opened that the joyous hearts inside
Might welcome as it were an angel-guest
Come in Christ's name to knock and enter, sup
And satisfy the loving ones he saved;
And so did welcome devils and their death?
I have been silent on that circumstance
Although the couple passed for close of kin
To wife and husband, were by some accounts
Pompilia's very parents: you know best.

Also that infant the great joy was for,
That Gaetano, the wife's two-weeks' babe,
The husband's first-born child, his son and heir,
Whose birth and being turned his night to day —
Why must the father kill the mother thus
Because she bore his son and saved himself?

Well, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!) and will have your proper laugh
At the dark question, laugh it! I laugh first.
Truth must prevail, the proverb vows; and truth
— Here is it all i' the book at last, as first
There it was all i' the heads and hearts of Rome
Gentle and simple, never to fall nor fade
Nor be forgotten. Yet, a little while,
The passage of a century or so,
Decads thrice five, and here's time paid his tax,
Oblivion gone home with her harvesting,
And all left smooth again as scythe could shave.
Far from beginning with you London folk,
I took my book to Rome first, tried truth's power
On likely people. "Have you met such names?
Is a tradition extant of such facts?
Your law-courts stand, your records frown a-row:
What if I rove and rummage?" "—Why, you 'll waste
Your pains and end as wise as you began!"
Everyone snickered: "names and facts thus old
Are newer much than Europe news we find
Down in to-day's *Diario*. Records, quotha?
Why, the French burned them, what else do the French?
The rap-and-rending nation! And it tells
Against the Church, no doubt, — another gird
At the Temporality, your Trial, of course?"
"— Quite otherwise this time," submitted I;

"Clean for the Church and dead against the world,
The flesh and the devil, does it tell for once."
"— The rarer and the happier! All the same,
Content you with your treasure of a book,
And waive what 's wanting! Take a friend's advice!
It 's not the custom of the country. Mend
Your ways indeed and we may stretch a point:
Go get you manned by Manning and new-manned
By Newman and, mayhap, wise-manned to boot
By Wiseman, and we 'll see or else we won't!
Thanks meantime for the story, long and strong,
A pretty piece of narrative enough,
Which scarce ought so to drop out, one would think,
From the more curious annals of our kind.
Do you tell the story, now, in off-hand style,
Straight from the book? Or simply here and there,
(The while you vault it through the loose and large)
Hang to a hint? Or is there book at all,
And don't you deal in poetry, make-believe,
And the white lies it sounds like?"

Yes and no!
From the book, yes; thence bit by bit I dug
The lingot truth, that memorable day,
Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold, —
Yes; but from something else surpassing that,
Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
Made it bear hammer and be firm to file.
Fancy with fact is just one fact the more;
To-wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,
Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free,
As right through ring and ring runs the djereed
And binds the loose, one bar without a break.
I fused my live soul and that inert stuff,

Before attempting smithcraft, on the night
After the day when, — truth thus grasped and gained,—
The book was shut and done with and laid by
On the cream-colored massive agate, broad
'Neath the twin cherubs in the tarnished frame
O' the mirror, tall thence to the ceiling-top.
And from the reading, and that slab I leant
My elbow on, the while I read and read,
I turned, to free myself and find the world,
And stepped out on the narrow terrace, built
Over the street and opposite the church,
And paced its lozenge-brickwork sprinkled cool ;
Because Felice-church-side stretched, a-glow
Through each square window fringed for festival,
Whence came the clear voice of the cloistered ones
Chanting a chant made for midsummer nights —
I know not what particular praise of God,
It always came and went with June. Beneath
I' the street, quick shown by openings of the sky
When flame fell silently from cloud to cloud,
Richer than that gold snow Jove rained on Rhodes,
The townsmen walked by twos and threes, and talked,
Drinking the blackness in default of air —
A busy human sense beneath my feet :
While in and out the terrace-plants, and round
One branch of tall datura, waxed and waned
The lamp-fly lured there, wanting the white flower.
Over the roof o' the lighted church I looked
A bowshot to the street's end, north away
Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road
By the river, till I felt the Apennine.
And there would lie Arezzo, the man's town,
The woman's trap and cage and torture-place,
Also the stage where the priest played his part,

A spectacle for angels, — ay, indeed,
There lay Arezzo ! Farther then I fared,
Feeling my way on through the hot and dense,
Romeward, until I found the wayside inn
By Castelnuovo's few mean hut-like homes
Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak,
Bare, broken only by that tree or two
Against the sudden bloody splendor poured
Cursewise in day's departure by the sun
O'er the low house-roof of that squalid inn
Where they three, for the first time and the last,
Husband and wife and priest, met face to face.
Whence I went on again, the end was near,
Step by step, missing none and marking all,
Till Rome itself, the ghastly goal, I reached.
Why, all the while, — how could it otherwise ? —
The life in me abolished the death of things,
Deep calling unto deep : as then and there
Acted itself over again once more
The tragic piece. I saw with my own eyes
In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed
The beauty and the fearfulness of night,
How it had run, this round from Rome to Rome —
Because, you are to know, they lived at Rome,
Pompilia's parents, as they thought themselves,
Two poor ignoble hearts who did their best
Part God's way, part the other way than God's,
To somehow make a shift and scramble through
The world's mud, careless if it splashed and spoiled,
Provided they might so hold high, keep clean
Their child's soul, one soul white enough for three,
And lift it to whatever star should stoop,
What possible sphere of purer life than theirs
Should come in aid of whiteness hard to save.

I saw the star stoop, that they strained to touch,
And did touch and depose their treasure on,
As Guido Franceschini took away
Pompilia to be his for evermore,
While they sang "Now let us depart in peace,
Having beheld thy glory, Guido's wife!"
I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,
Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell;
Having been heaved up, haled on its gross way,
By hands unguessed before, invisible help
From a dark brotherhood, and specially
Two obscure goblin creatures, fox-faced this,
Cat-clawed the other, called his next of kin
By Guido the main monster, — cloaked and caped,
Making as they were priests, to mock God more, —
Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo.
These who had rolled the starlike pest to Rome
And stationed it to suck up and absorb
The sweetness of Pompilia, rolled again
That bloated bubble, with her soul inside,
Back to Arezzo and a palace there —
Or say, a fissure in the honest earth
Whence long ago had curled the vapor first,
Blown big by nether fires to appal day:
It touched home, broke, and blasted far and wide.
I saw the cheated couple find the cheat
And guess what foul rite they were captured for, —
Too fain to follow over hill and dale
That child of theirs caught up thus in the cloud
And carried by the Prince o' the Power of the Air
Whither he would, to wilderness or sea.
I saw them, in the potency of fear,
Break somehow through the satyr-family
(For a gray mother with a monkey-mien,

Mopping and mowing, was apparent too,
As confident of capture, all took hands
And danced about the captives in a ring)
— Saw them break through, breathe safe, at Rome again,
Saved by the selfish instinct, losing so
Their loved one left with haters. These I saw,
In recrudescency of baffled hate,
Prepare to wring the uttermost revenge
From body and soul thus left them: all was sure,
Fire laid and cauldron set, the obscene ring traced,
The victim stripped and prostrate: what of God?
The cleaving of a cloud, a cry, a crash,
Quenched lay their cauldron, cowered i' the dust the crew,
As, in a glory of armor like Saint George,
Out again sprang the young good beauteous priest
Bearing away the lady in his arms,
Saved for a splendid minute and no more.
For, whom i' the path did that priest come upon,
He and the poor lost lady borne so brave,
— Checking the song of praise in me, had else
Swelled to the full for God's will done on earth —
Whom but a dusk misfeatured messenger,
No other than the angel of this life,
Whose care is lest men see too much at once.
He made the sign, such God-glimpse must suffice,
Nor prejudice the Prince o' the Power of the Air,
Whose ministration piles us overhead
What we call, first, earth's roof and, last, heaven's floor,
Now grate o' the trap, then outlet of the cage:
So took the lady, left the priest alone,
And once more canopied the world with black.
But through the blackness I saw Rome again,
And where a solitary villa stood
In a lone garden-quarter: it was eve,

The second of the year, and oh so cold!
Ever and anon there flittered through the air
A snow-flake, and a scanty couch of snow
Crusted the grass-walk and the garden-mould.
All was grave, silent, sinister, — when, ha?
Glimmeringly did a pack of were-wolves pad
The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,
And all five found and footed it, the track,
To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light
Betrayed the villa-door with life inside,
While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes,
And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,
And tongues that lolled — Oh God that madest man!
They parleyed in their language. Then one whined —
That was the policy and master-stroke —
Deep in his throat whispered what seemed a name —
"Open to Caponsacchi!" Guido cried:
"Gabriel!" cried Lucifer at Eden-gate.
Wide as a heart, opened the door at once,
Showing the joyous couple, and their child
The two-weeks' mother, to the wolves, the wolves
To them. Close eyes! And when the corpses lay
Stark-stretched, and those the wolves, their wolf-work done,
Were safe-embosomed by the night again,
I knew a necessary change in things;
As when the worst watch of the night gives way,
And there comes duly, to take cognizance,
The scrutinizing eye-point of some star —
And who despairs of a new daybreak now?
Lo, the first ray protruded on those five!
It reached them, and each felon writhed transfixed.
Awhile they palpitated on the spear
Motionless over Tophet: stand or fall?

"I say, the spear should fall — should stand, I say!"
Cried the world come to judgment, granting grace
Or dealing doom according to world's wont,
Those world's-bystanders grouped on Rome's cross-road
At prick and summons of the primal curse
Which bids man love as well as make a lie.
There prattled they, discoursed the right and wrong,
Turned wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep wolves,
So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece;
Till out spoke a great guardian of the fold,
Stood up, put forth his hand that held the crook,
And motioned that the arrested point decline:
Horribly off, the wriggling dead-weight reeled,
Rushed to the bottom and lay ruined there.
Though still at the pit's mouth, despite the smoke
O' the burning, tarriers turned again to talk
And trim the balance, and detect at least
A touch of wolf in what showed whitest sheep,
A cross of sheep redeeming the whole wolf, —
Vex truth a little longer: — less and less,
Because years came and went, and more and more
Brought new lies with them to be loved in turn.
Till all at once the memory of the thing, —
The fact that, wolves or sheep, such creatures were, —
Which hitherto, however men supposed,
Had somehow plain and pillar-like prevailed
I' the midst of them, indisputably fact,
Granite, time's tooth should grate against, not graze, —
Why, this proved sandstone, friable, fast to fly
And give its grain away at wish o' the wind.
Ever and ever more diminutive,
Base gone, shaft lost, only entablature,
Dwindled into no bigger than a book,

Lay of the column; and that little, left
By the roadside 'mid the ordure, shards and weeds.
Until I haply, wandering that lone way,
Kicked it up, turned it over, and recognized,
For all the crumblement, this abacus,
This square old yellow book, — could calculate
By this the lost proportions of the style.

This was it from, my fancy with those facts,
I used to tell the tale, turned gay to grave,
But lacked a listener seldom; such alloy,
Such substance of me interfused the gold
Which, wrought into a shapely ring therewith,
Hammered and filed, fingered and favored, last
Lay ready for the renovating wash
O' the water. "How much of the tale was true?"
I disappeared; the book grew all in all;
The lawyers' pleadings swelled back to their size, —
Doubled in two, the crease upon them yet,
For more commodity of carriage, see! —
And these are letters, veritable sheets
That brought posthaste the news to Florence, writ
At Rome the day Count Guido died, we find,
To stay the craving of a client there,
Who bound the same and so produced my book.
Lovers of dead truth, did ye fare the worse?
Lovers of live truth, found ye false my tale?

Well, now; there 's nothing in nor out o' the world
Good except truth: yet this, the something else,
What 's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue?
This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine
That quickened, made the inertness malleolable

O' the gold was not mine, — what 's your name for this?
Are means to the end, themselves in part the end?
Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?
The somehow may be thishow.

I find first
Writ down for very A B C of fact,
"In the beginning God made heaven and earth;"
From which, no matter with what lisp, I spell
And speak you out a consequence — that man,
Man, — as befits the made, the inferior thing, —
Purposed, since made, to grow, not make in turn,
Yet forced to try and make, else fail to grow, —
Formed to rise, reach at, if not grasp and gain
The good beyond him, — which attempt is growth, —
Repeats God's process in man's due degree,
Attaining man's proportionate result, —
Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps.
Inalienable, the arch-prerogative
Which turns thought, act — conceives, expresses too!
No less, man, bounded, yearning to be free,
May so project his surplusage of soul
In search of body, so add self to self
By owning what lay ownerless before, —
So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms —
That, although nothing which had never life
Shall get life from him, be, not having been,
Yet, something dead may get to live again,
Something with too much life or not enough,
Which, either way imperfect, ended once:
An end whereat man's impulse intervenes,
Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,
Completes the incomplete and saves the thing.
Man's breath were vain to light a virgin wick, —

Half-burned-out, all but quite-quenched wicks o' the lamp
Stationed for temple-service on this earth,
These indeed let him breathe on and relume!
For such man's feat is, in the due degree,
— Mimic creation, galvanism for life,
But still a glory portioned in the scale.
Why did the mage say, — feeling as we are wont
For truth, and stopping midway short of truth,
And resting on a lie, — "I raise a ghost"?
"Because," he taught adepts, "man makes not man.
Yet by a special gift, an art of arts,
More insight and more outsight and much more
Will to use both of these than boast my mates,
I can detach from me, commission forth
Half of my soul; which in its pilgrimage
O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,
May chance upon some fragment of a whole,
Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,
Smoking flax that fed fire once: prompt therein
I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,
Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last
(By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)
What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,
Mistakenly felt: then write my name with Faust's!"
Oh, Faust, why Faust? Was not Elisha once? —
Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face.
There was no voice, no hearing: he went in
Therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,
And prayed unto the Lord: and he went up
And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes
Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,
And stretched him on the flesh; the flesh waxed warm:
And he returned, walked to and fro the house,

And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,
And the eyes opened. 'T is a credible feat
With the right man and way.

Enough of me !
The Book ! I turn its medicinable leaves
In London now till, as in Florence erst,
A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,
And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,
Letting me have my will again with these
— How title I the dead alive once more ?

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine,
Descended of an ancient house, though poor,
A beak-nosed bushy-bearded black-haired lord,
Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust,
Fifty years old, — having four years ago
Married Pompilia Comparini, young,
Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born,
And brought her to Arezzo, where they lived
Unhappy lives, whatever curse the cause, —
This husband, taking four accomplices,
Followed this wife to Rome, where she was fled
From their Arezzo to find peace again,
In convoy, eight months earlier, of a priest,
Aretine also, of still nobler birth,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi, — caught her there
Quiet in a villa on a Christmas night,
With only Pietro and Violante by,
Both her putative parents ; killed the three,
Aged, they, seventy each, and she, seventeen,
And, two weeks since, the mother of his babe
First-born and heir to what the style was worth
O' the Guido who determined, dared and did

This deed just as he purposed point by point.
Then, bent upon escape, but hotly pressed,
And captured with his co-mates that same night,
He, brought to trial, stood on this defence —
Injury to his honor caused the act;
And since his wife was false, (as manifest
By flight from home in such companionship,)
Death, punishment deserved of the false wife
And faithless parents who abetted her
I' the flight aforesaid, wronged nor God nor man.
"Nor false she, nor yet faithless they," replied
The accuser; "cloaked and masked this murder glooms;
True was Pompilia, loyal too the pair;
Out of the man's own heart a monster curled
Which — crime coiled with connivancy at crime —
His victim's breast, he tells you, hatched and reared;
Uncoil we and stretch stark the worm of hell!"
A month the trial swayed this way and that
Ere judgment settled down on Guido's guilt;
Then was the Pope, that good Twelfth Innocent,
Appealed to: who well weighed what went before,
Affirmed the guilt and gave the guilty doom.

Let this old woe step on the stage again!
Act itself o'er anew for men to judge,
Not by the very sense and sight indeed —
(Which take at best imperfect cognizance,
Since, how heart moves brain, and how both move hand,
What mortal ever in entirety saw?)
— No dose of purer truth than man digests,
But truth with falsehood, milk that feeds him now,
Not strong meat he may get to bear some day —
To-wit, by voices we call evidence,
Uproar in the echo, live fact deadened down,

Talked over, bruited abroad, whispered away,
Yet helping us to all we seem to hear:
For how else know we save by worth of word?

Here are the voices presently shall sound
In due succession. First, the world's outcry
Around the rush and ripple of any fact
Fallen stonewise, plumb on the smooth face of things;
The world's guess, as it crowds the bank o' the pool,
At what were figure and substance, by their splash:
Then, by vibrations in the general mind,
At depth of deed already out of reach.
This threefold murder of the day before, —
Say, Half-Rome's feel after the vanished truth;
Honest enough, as the way is: all the same,
Harboring in the centre of its sense
A hidden germ of failure, shy but sure,
To neutralize that honesty and leave
That feel for truth at fault, as the way is too.
Some prepossession such as starts amiss,
By but a hair's breadth at the shoulder-blade,
The arm o' the feeler, dip he ne'er so bold;
So leads arm waveringly, lets fall wide
O' the mark its finger, sent to find and fix
Truth at the bottom, that deceptive speck.
With this Half-Rome, — the source of swerving, call
Over-belief in Guido's right and wrong
Rather than in Pompilia's wrong and right:
Who shall say how, who shall say why? 'T is there —
The instinctive theorizing whence a fact
Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look.
Gossip in a public place, a sample-speech.
Some worthy, with his previous hint to find
A husband's side the safer, and no whit

Aware he is not Æacus the while, —
How such an one supposes and states fact
To whosoever of a multitude
Will listen, and perhaps prolong thereby
The not-unpleasant flutter at the breast,
Born of a certain spectacle shut in
By the church Lorenzo opposite. So, they lounge
Midway the mouth o' the street, on Corso side,
'Twixt palace Fiano and palace Ruspoli,
Linger and listen; keeping clear o' the crowd,
Yet wishful one could lend that crowd one's eyes,
(So universal is its plague of squint)
And make hearts beat our time that flutter false:
— All for the truth's sake, mere truth, nothing else!
How Half-Rome found for Guido much excuse.

Next, from Rome's other half, the opposite feel
For truth with a like swerve, like unsuccess, —
Or if success, by no skill but more luck
This time, through siding rather with the wife,
Because a fancy-fit inclined that way,
Than with the husband. One wears drab, one pink;
Who wears pink, ask him "Which shall win the race,
Of coupled runners like as egg and egg?"
"— Why, if I must choose, he with the pink scarf."
Doubtless for some such reason choice fell here.
A piece of public talk to correspond
At the next stage of the story; just a day
Let pass and new day brings the proper change.
Another sample-speech i' the market-place
O' the Barberini by the Capucins;
Where the old Triton, at his fountain-sport,
Bernini's creature plated to the paps,
Puffs up steel sleet which breaks to diamond dust,

A spray of sparkles snorted from his conch,
High over the caritellas, out o' the way
O' the motley merchandizing multitude.
Our murder has been done three days ago,
The frost is over and gone, the south wind laughs,
And, to the very tiles of each red roof
A-smoke i' the sunshine, Rome lies gold and glad :
So, listen how, to the other half of Rome,
Pompilia seemed a saint and martyr both !

Then, yet another day let come and go,
With pause prelusive still of novelty,
Hear a fresh speaker ! — neither this nor that
Half-Rome aforesaid ; something bred of both :
One and one breed the inevitable three.
Such is the personage harangues you next ;
The elaborated product, *tertium quid :*
Rome's first commotion in subsidence gives
The curd o' the cream, flower o' the wheat, as it were,
And finer sense o' the city. Is this plain ?
You get a reasoned statement of the case,
Eventual verdict of the curious few
Who care to sift a business to the bran
Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort.
Here, after ignorance, instruction speaks ;
Here, clarity of candor, history's soul,
The critical mind, in short : no gossip-guess.
What the superior social section thinks,
In person of some man of quality
Who, — breathing musk from lace-work and brocade,
His solitaire amid the flow of frill,
Powdered peruke on nose, and bag at back,
And cane dependent from the ruffled wrist, —
Harangues in silvery and selectest phrase

'Neath waxlight in a glorified saloon
Where mirrors multiply the girandole:
Courting the approbation of no mob,
But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That
Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,
Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,
Around the argument, the rational word —
Still, spite its weight and worth, a sample-speech.
How Quality dissertated on the case.

So much for Rome and rumor; smoke comes first:
Once let smoke rise untroubled, we descry
Clearlier what tongues of flame may spire and spit
To eye and ear, each with appropriate tinge
According to its food, or pure or foul.
The actors, no mere rumors of the act,
Intervene. First you hear Count Guido's voice,
In a small chamber that adjoins the court,
Where Governor and Judges, summoned thence,
Tommati, Venturini and the rest,
Find the accused ripe for declaring truth.
Soft-cushioned sits he; yet shifts seat, shirks touch,
As, with a twitchy brow and wincing lip
And cheek that changes to all kinds of white,
He proffers his defence, in tones subdued
Near to mock-mildness now, so mournful seems
The obtuser sense truth fails to satisfy;
Now, moved, from pathos at the wrong endured,
To passion; for the natural man is roused
At fools who first do wrong then pour the blame
Of their wrong-doing, Satan-like, on Job.
Also his tongue at times is hard to curb;
Incisive, nigh satiric bites the phrase,
Rough-raw, yet somehow claiming privilege

— It is so hard for shrewdness to admit
Folly means no harm when she calls black white!
— Eruption momentary at the most,
Modified forthwith by a fall o' the fire,
Sage acquiescence; for the world 's the world,
And, what it errs in, Judges rectify:
He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms
Crosswise and makes his mind up to be meek.
And never once does he detach his eye
From those ranged there to slay him or to save,
But does his best man's-service for himself,
Despite, — what twitches brow and makes lip wince, —
His limbs' late taste of what was called the Cord,
Or Vigil-torture more facetiously.
Even so; they were wont to tease the truth
Out of loth witness (toying, trifling time)
By torture: 't was a trick, a vice of the age,
Here, there and everywhere, what would you have?
Religion used to tell Humanity
She gave him warrant or denied him course.
And since the course was much to his own mind,
Of pinching flesh and pulling bone from bone
To unhusk truth a-hiding in its hulls,
Nor whisper of a warning stopped the way,
He, in their joint behalf, the burly slave,
Bestirred him, mauled and maimed all recusants,
While, prim in place, Religion overlooked;
And so had done till doomsday, never a sign
Nor sound of interference from her mouth,
But that at last the burly slave wiped brow,
Let eye give notice as if soul were there,
Muttered " 'T is a vile trick, foolish more than vile,
Should have been counted sin; I make it so:

At any rate no more of it for me —
Nay, for I break the torture-engine thus!"
Then did Religion start up, stare amain,
Look round for help and see none, smile and say
"What, broken is the rack? Well done of thee!
Did I forget to abrogate its use?
Be the mistake in common with us both!
— One more fault our blind age shall answer for,
Down in my book denounced though it must be
Somewhere. Henceforth find truth by milder means!"
Ah but, Religion, did we wait for thee
To ope the book, that serves to sit upon,
And pick such place out, we should wait indeed!
That is all history: and what is not now,
Was then, defendants found it to their cost.
How Guido, after being tortured, spoke.

Also hear Caponsacchi who comes next,
Man and priest — could you comprehend the coil! —
In days when that was rife which now is rare.
How, mingling each its multifarious wires,
Now heaven, now earth, now heaven and earth at once,
Had plucked at and perplexed their puppet here,
Played off the young frank personable priest;
Sworn fast and tonsured plain heaven's celibate,
And yet earth's clear-accepted servitor,
A courtly spiritual Cupid, squire of dames
By law of love and mandate of the mode.
The Church's own, or why parade her seal,
Wherefore that chrism and consecrative work?
Yet verily the world's, or why go badged
A prince of sonneteers and lutanists,
Show color of each vanity in vogue
Borne with decorum due on blameless breast?

All that is changed now, as he tells the court
How he had played the part excepted at;
Tells it, moreover, now the second time:
Since, for his cause of scandal, his own share
I' the flight from home and husband of the wife,
He has been censured, punished in a sort
By relegation, — exile, we should say,
To a short distance for a little time, —
Whence he is summoned on a sudden now,
Informed that she, he thought to save, is lost,
And, in a breath, bidden re-tell his tale,
Since the first telling somehow missed effect,
And then advise in the matter. There stands he,
While the same grim black-panelled chamber blinks
As though rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome
Told the same oak for ages — wave-washed wall
Against which sets a sea of wickedness.
There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak,
Speaks Caponsacchi; and there face him too
Tommati, Venturini and the rest
Who, eight months earlier, scarce repressed the smile,
Forewent the wink; waived recognition so
Of peccadillos incident to youth,
Especially youth high-born; for youth means love,
Vows can't change nature, priests are only men,
And love likes stratagem and subterfuge
Which age, that once was youth, should recognize,
May blame, but needs not press too hard upon.
Here sit the old Judges then, but with no grace
Of reverend carriage, magisterial port:
For why? The accused of eight months since —the same
Who cut the conscious figure of a fool,
Changed countenance, dropped bashful gaze to ground,
While hesitating for an answer then, —

Now is grown judge himself, terrifies now
This, now the other culprit called a judge,
Whose turn it is to stammer and look strange,
As he speaks rapidly, angrily, speech that smites:
And they keep silence, bear blow after blow,
Because the seeming-solitary man,
Speaking for God, may have an audience too,
Invisible, no discreet judge provokes.
How the priest Caponsacchi said his say.

Then a soul sighs its lowest and its last
After the loud ones, — so much breath remains
Unused by the four-days'-dying; for she lived
Thus long, miraculously long, 't was thought,
Just that Pompilia might defend herself.
How, while the hireling and the alien stoop,
Comfort, yet question, — since the time is brief,
And folk, allowably inquisitive,
Encircle the low pallet where she lies
In the good house that helps the poor to die, —
Pompilia tells the story of her life.
For friend and lover, — leech and man of law
Do service; busy helpful ministrants
As varied in their calling as their mind,
Temper and age: and yet from all of these,
About the white bed under the arched roof,
Is somehow, as it were, evolved a one, —
Small separate sympathies combined and large,
Nothings that were, grown something very much:
As if the bystanders gave each his straw,
All he had, though a trifle in itself,
Which, plaited all together, made a Cross
Fit to die looking on and praying with,
Just as well as if ivory or gold.

So, to the common kindliness she speaks,
There being scarce more privacy at the last
For mind than body : but she is used to bear,
And only unused to the brotherly look.
How she endeavored to explain her life.

Then, since a Trial ensued, a touch o' the same
To sober us, flustered with frothy talk,
And teach our common sense its helplessness.
For why deal simply with divining-rod,
Scrape where we fancy secret sources flow,
And ignore law, the recognized machine,
Elaborate display of pipe and wheel
Framed to unchoke, pump up and pour apace
Truth till a flowery foam shall wash the world ?
The patent truth-extracting process, — ha ?
Let us make that grave mystery turn one wheel,
Give you a single grind of law at least !
One Orator, of two on either side,
Shall teach us the puissance of the tongue
— That is, o' the pen which simulated tongue
On paper and saved all except the sound
Which never was. Law's speech beside law's thought ?
That were too stunning, too immense an odds :
That point of vantage law lets nobly pass.
One lawyer shall admit us to behold
The manner of the making out a case,
First fashion of a speech ; the chick in egg,
The masterpiece law's bosom incubates.
How Don Giacinto of the Arcangeli,
Called Procurator of the Poor at Rome,
Now advocate for Guido and his mates, —
The jolly learned man of middle age,
Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,

Mirthful as mighty, yet, as great hearts use,
Despite the name and fame that tempt our flesh,
Constant to that devotion of the hearth,
Still captive in those dear domestic ties! —
How he, — having a cause to triumph with,
All kind of interests to keep intact,
More than one efficacious personage
To tranquillize, conciliate and secure,
And above all, public anxiety
To quiet, show its Guido in good hands, —
Also, as if such burdens were too light,
A certain family-feast to claim his care,
The birthday-banquet for the only son —
Paternity at smiling strife with law —
How he brings both to buckle in one bond;
And, thick at throat, with waterish under-eye,
Turns to his task and settles in his seat
And puts his utmost means in practice now:
Wheezes out law-phrase, whiffles Latin forth,
And, just as though roast lamb would never be,
Makes logic levigate the big crime small:
Rubs palm on palm, rakes foot with itchy foot,
Conceives and inchoates the argument,
Sprinkling each flower appropriate to the time,
— Ovidian quip or Ciceronian crank,
A-bubble in the larynx while he laughs,
As he had fritters deep down frying there.
How he turns, twists, and tries the oily thing
Shall be — first speech for Guido 'gainst the Fisc.

Then with a skip as it were from heel to head,
Leaving yourselves fill up the middle bulk
O' the Trial, reconstruct its shape august,
From such exordium clap we to the close;

Give you, if we dare wing to such a height,
The absolute glory in some full-grown speech
On the other side, some finished butterfly,
Some breathing diamond-flake with leaf-gold fans,
That takes the air, no trace of worm it was,
Or cabbage-bed it had production from.
Giovambattista o' the Bottini, Fisc,
Pompilia's patron by the chance of the hour,
To-morrow her persecutor, — composite, he,
As becomes who must meet such various calls —
Odds of age joined in him with ends of youth.
A man of ready smile and facile tear,
Improvised hopes, despairs at nod and beck,
And language — ah, the gift of eloquence !
Language that goes, goes, easy as a glove,
O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one.
Rashness helps caution with him, fires the straw,
In free enthusiastic careless fit,
On the first proper pinnacle of rock
Which offers, as reward for all that zeal,
To lure some bark to founder and bring gain :
While calm sits Caution, rapt with heavenward eye,
A true confessor's gaze, amid the glare
Beaconing to the breaker, death and hell.
" Well done, thou good and faithful ! " she approves :
" Hadst thou let slip a fagot to the beach,
The crew might surely spy thy precipice
And save their boat ; the simple and the slow
Might so, forsooth, forestall the wrecker's fee !
Let the next crew be wise and hail in time ! "
Just so compounded is the outside man,
Blue juvenile pure eye and pippin cheek,
And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed
With sudden age, bright devastated hair.

Ah, but you miss the very tones o' the voice,
The scrannel pipe that screams in heights of head,
As, in his modest studio, all alone,
The tall wight stands a-tiptoe, strives and strains,
Both eyes shut, like the cockerel that would crow,
Tries to his own self amorously o'er
What never will be uttered else than so —
Since to the four walls, Forum and Mars' Hill,
Speaks out the poesy which, penned, turns prose.
Clavecinist debarred his instrument,
He yet thrums — shirking neither turn nor trill,
With desperate finger on dumb table-edge —
The sovereign rondo, shall conclude his *Suite*,
Charm an imaginary audience there,
From old Corelli to young Haendel, both
I' the flesh at Rome, ere he perforce go print
The cold black score, mere music for the mind —
The last speech against Guido and his gang,
With special end to prove Pompilia pure.
How the Fisc vindicates Pompilia's fame.

Then comes the all but end, the ultimate
Judgment save yours. Pope Innocent the Twelfth,
Simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute,
With prudence, probity and — what beside
From the other world he feels impress at times,
Having attained to fourscore years and six, —
How, when the court found Guido and the rest
Guilty, but law supplied a subterfuge
And passed the final sentence to the Pope,
He, bringing his intelligence to bear
This last time on what ball behoves him drop
In the urn, or white or black, does drop a black,
Send five souls more to just precede his own,

Stand him in stead and witness, if need were,
How he is wont to do God's work on earth.
The manner of his sitting out the dim
Droop of a sombre February day
In the plain closet where he does such work,
With, from all Peter's treasury, one stool,
One table, and one lathen crucifix.
There sits the Pope, his thoughts for company;
Grave but not sad, — nay, something like a cheer
Leaves the lips free to be benevolent,
Which, all day long, did duty firm and fast.
A cherishing there is of foot and knee,
A chafing loose-skinned large-veined hand with hand, —
What steward but knows when stewardship earns its wage,
May levy praise, anticipate the lord?
He reads, notes, lays the papers down at last,
Muses, then takes a turn about the room;
Unclasps a huge tome in an antique guise,
Primitive print and tongue half obsolete,
That stands him in diurnal stead; opes page,
Finds place where falls the passage to be conned
According to an order long in use:
And, as he comes upon the evening's chance,
Starts somewhat, solemnizes straight his smile,
Then reads aloud that portion first to last,
And at the end lets flow his own thoughts forth
Likewise aloud, for respite and relief,
Till by the dreary relics of the west
Wan through the half-moon window, all his light,
He bows the head while the lips move in prayer,
Writes some three brief lines, signs and seals the same,
Tinkles a hand-bell, bids the obsequious Sir
Who puts foot presently o' the closet-sill

He watched outside of, bear as superscribed
That mandate to the Governor forthwith :
Then heaves abroad his cares in one good sigh,
Traverses corridor with no arm's help,
And so to sup as a clear conscience should.
The manner of the judgment of the Pope.

Then must speak Guido yet a second time,
Satan's old saw being apt here — skin for skin,
All a man hath that will he give for life.
While life was graspable and gainable,
And bird-like buzzed her wings round Guido's brow,
Not much truth stiffened out the web of words
He wove to catch her : when away she flew
And death came, death's breath rivelled up the lies,
Left bare the metal thread, the fibre fine
Of truth, i' the spinning: the true words shone last.
How Guido, to another purpose quite,
Speaks and despairs, the last night of his life,
In that New Prison by Castle Angelo
At the bridge foot : the same man, another voice.
On a stone bench in a close fetid cell,
Where the hot vapor of an agony,
Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down —
Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears —
There crouch, well nigh to the knees in dungeon-straw,
Lit by the sole lamp suffered for their sake,
Two awe-struck figures, this a Cardinal,
That an Abate, both of old styled friends
O' the thing part man part monster in the midst,
So changed is Franceschini's gentle blood.
The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,
That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,
Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth joined ;

Then you know how the bristling fury foams.
They listen, this wrapped in his folds of red,
While his feet fumble for the filth below;
The other, as beseems a stouter heart,
Working his best with beads and cross to ban
The enemy that comes in like a flood
Spite of the standard set up, verily
And in no trope at all, against him there:
For at the prison-gate, just a few steps
Outside, already, in the doubtful dawn,
Thither, from this side and from that, slow sweep
And settle down in silence solidly,
Crow-wise, the frightful Brotherhood of Death.
Black-hatted and black-hooded huddle they,
Black rosaries a-dangling from each waist;
So take they their grim station at the door,
Torches lit, skull-and-cross-bones-banner spread,
And that gigantic Christ with open arms,
Grounded. Nor lacks there aught but that the group
Break forth, intone the lamentable psalm,
"Out of the deeps, Lord, have I cried to thee!" —
When inside, from the true profound, a sign
Shall bear intelligence that the foe is foiled,
Count Guido Franceschini has confessed,
And is absolved and reconciled with God.
Then they, intoning, may begin their march,
Make by the longest way for the People's Square,
Carry the criminal to his crime's award:
A mob to cleave, a scaffolding to reach,
Two gallows and Mannaia crowning all.
How Guido made defence a second time.

Finally, even as thus by step and step
I led you from the level of to-day

Up to the summit of so long ago,
Here, whence I point you the wide prospect round —
Let me, by like steps, slope you back to smooth,
Land you on mother-earth, no whit the worse,
To feed o' the fat o' the furrow : free to dwell,
Taste our time's better things profusely spread
For all who love the level, corn and wine,
Much cattle and the many-folded fleece.
Shall not my friends go feast again on sward,
Though cognizant of country in the clouds
Higher than wistful eagle's horny eye
Ever unclosed for, 'mid ancestral crags,
When morning broke and Spring was back once more,
And he died, heaven, save by his heart, unreached ?
Yet heaven my fancy lifts to, ladder-like, —
As Jack reached, holpen of his beanstalk-rungs !

A novel country : I might make it mine
By choosing which one aspect of the year
Suited mood best, and putting solely that
On panel somewhere in the House of Fame,
Landscaping what I saved, not what I saw :
— Might fix you, whether frost in goblin-time
Startled the moon with his abrupt bright laugh,
Or, August's hair afloat in filmy fire,
She fell, arms wide, face foremost on the world,
Swooned there and so singed out the strength of things.
Thus were abolished Spring and Autumn both,
The land dwarfed to one likeness of the land,
Life cramped corpse-fashion. Rather learn and love
Each facet-flash of the revolving year ! —
Red, green and blue that whirl into a white
The variance now, the eventual unity,
Which make the miracle. See it for yourselves,

This man's act, changeable because alive!
Action now shrouds, nor shows the informing thought;
Man, like a glass ball with a spark a-top,
Out of the magic fire that lurks inside,
Shows one tint at a time to take the eye:
Which, let a finger touch the silent sleep,
Shifted a hair's-breadth shoots you dark for bright,
Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so
Your sentence absolute for shine or shade.
Once set such orbs,— white styled, black stigmatized,—
A-rolling, see them once on the other side
Your good men and your bad men every one
From Guido Franceschini to Guy Faux,
Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names.

Such, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!) — whom I yet have labored for,
Perchance more careful whoso runs may read
Than erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran, —
Perchance more careless whoso reads may praise
Than late when he who praised and read and wrote
Was apt to find himself the self-same me, —
Such labor had such issue, so I wrought
This arc, by furtherance of such alloy,
And so, by one spirt, take away its trace
Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring.

A ring without a posy, and that ring mine?

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire, —
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face, —

Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart —
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory — to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to die, —
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand —
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendor once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
— Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on, — so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!

II.

HALF-ROME.

[Book II. gives the facts of the story ending in the murder as known to the general public and colored by the partisanship of the speaker for wronged husbands. His sympathies are, therefore, with Guido, and he is the mouthpiece of one half Rome. The scene is by the church of San Lorenzo, in and out of which a crowd has surged all day, curious to view Guido's victims, Pietro and Violante.]

WHAT, you, Sir, come too? (Just the man I 'd meet.)
Be ruled by me and have a care o' the crowd:
This way, while fresh folk go and get their gaze:
I 'll tell you like a book and save your shins.
Fie, what a roaring day we 've had! Whose fault?
Lorenzo in Lucina, — here 's a church
To hold a crowd at need, accommodate
All comers from the Corso! If this crush
Make not its priests ashamed of what they show
For temple-room, don't prick them to draw purse
And down with bricks and mortar, eke us out
The beggarly transept with its bit of apse
Into a decent space for Christian ease,
Why, to-day's lucky pearl is cast to swine.
Listen and estimate the luck they 've had!
(The right man, and I hold him.)
Sir, do you see,
They laid both bodies in the church, this morn
The first thing, on the chancel two steps up,

Behind the little marble balustrade;
Disposed them, Pietro the old murdered fool
To the right of the altar, and his wretched wife
On the other side. In trying to count stabs,
People supposed Violante showed the most,
Till somebody explained us that mistake;
His wounds had been dealt out indifferent where,
But she took all her stabbings in the face,
Since punished thus solely for honor's sake,
Honoris causâ, that's the proper term.
A delicacy there is, our gallants hold,
When you avenge your honor and only then,
That you disfigure the subject, fray the face,
Not just take life and end, in clownish guise.
It was Violante gave the first offence,
Got therefore the conspicuous punishment:
While Pietro, who helped merely, his mere death
Answered the purpose, so his face went free.
We fancied even, free as you please, that face
Showed itself still intolerably wronged;
Was wrinkled over with resentment yet,
Nor calm at all, as murdered faces use,
Once the worst ended: an indignant air
O' the head there was — 't is said the body turned
Round and away, rolled from Violante's side
Where they had laid it loving-husband-like.
If so, if corpses can be sensitive,
Why did not he roll right down altar-step,
Roll on through nave, roll fairly out of church,
Deprive Lorenzo of the spectacle,
Pay back thus the succession of affronts
Whereto this church had served as theatre?
For see: at that same altar where he lies,
To that same inch of step, was brought the babe

For blessing after baptism, and there styled
Pompilia, and a string of names beside,
By his bad wife, some seventeen years ago,
Who purchased her simply to palm on him,
Flatter his dotage and defraud the heirs.
Wait awhile ! Also to this very step
Did this Violante, twelve years afterward,
Bring, the mock-mother, that child-cheat full-grown,
Pompilia, in pursuance of her plot,
And there brave God and man a second time
By linking a new victim to the lie.
There, having made a match unknown to him,
She, still unknown to Pietro, tied the knot
Which nothing cuts except this kind of knife;
Yes, made her daughter, as the girl was held,
Marry a man, and honest man beside,
And man of birth to boot, — clandestinely
Because of this, because of that, because
O' the devil's will to work his worst for once, —
Confident she could top her part at need
And, when her husband must be told in turn,
Ply the wife's trade, play off the sex's trick
And, alternating worry with quiet qualms,
Bravado with submissiveness, prettily fool
Her Pietro into patience : so it proved.
Ay, 't is four years since man and wife they grew,
This Guido Franceschini and this same
Pompilia, foolishly thought, falsely declared
A Comparini and the couple's child :
Just at this altar where, beneath the piece
Of Master Guido Reni, Christ on cross,
Second to naught observable in Rome,
That couple lie now, murdered yestereve.
Even the blind can see a providence here.

From dawn till now that it is growing dusk,
A multitude has flocked and filled the church,
Coming and going, coming back again,
Till to count crazed one. Rome was at the show.
People climbed up the columns, fought for spikes
O' the chapel-rail to perch themselves upon,
Jumped over and so broke the wooden work
Painted like porphyry to deceive the eye;
Serve the priests right! The organ-loft was crammed,
Women were fainting, no few fights ensued,
In short, it was a show repaid your pains:
For, though their room was scant undoubtedly,
Yet they did manage matters, to be just,
A little at this Lorenzo. Body o' me!
I saw a body exposed once . . . never mind!
Enough that here the bodies had their due.
No stinginess in wax, a row all round,
And one big taper at each head and foot.

So, people pushed their way, and took their turn,
Saw, threw their eyes up, crossed themselves, gave place
To pressure from behind, since all the world
Knew the old pair, could talk the tragedy
Over from first to last: Pompilia too,
Those who had known her — what 't was worth to them!
Guido's acquaintance was in less request;
The Count had lounged somewhat too long in Rome,
Made himself cheap; with him were hand and glove
Barbers and blear-eyed, as the ancient sings.
Also he is alive and like to be:
Had he considerately died, — aha!
I jostled Luca Cini on his staff,
Mute in the midst, the whole man one amaze,
Staring amain and crossing brow and breast.

"How now?" asked I. "'T is seventy years," quoth he,
"Since I first saw, holding my father's hand,
Bodies set forth: a many have I seen,
Yet all was poor to this I live and see.
Here the world's wickedness seals up the sum:
What with Molinos' doctrine and this deed,
Antichrist surely comes and doomsday 's near.
May I depart in peace, I have seen my see."
"Depart then," I advised, "nor block the road
For youngsters still behindhand with such sights!"
"Why no," rejoins the venerable sire,
"I know it 's horrid, hideous past belief,
Burdensome far beyond what eye can bear;
But they do promise, when Pompilia dies
I' the course o' the day, — and she can't outlive night, —
They 'll bring her body also to expose
Beside the parents, one, two, three abreast;
That were indeed a sight, which might I see,
I trust I should not last to see the like!"
Whereat I bade the senior spare his shanks,
Since doctors give her till to-night to live,
And tell us how the butchery happened. "Ah,
But you can't know!" sighs he, "I 'll not despair:
Beside I 'm useful at explaining things —
As, how the dagger laid there at the feet,
Caused the peculiar cuts; I mind its make,
Triangular i' the blade, a Genoese,
Armed with those little hook-teeth on the edge
To open in the flesh nor shut again:
I like to teach a novice: I shall stay!"
And stay he did, and stay be sure he will.

A personage came by the private door
At noon to have his look: I name no names:

Well then, His Eminence the Cardinal,
Whose servitor in honorable sort
Guido was once, the same who made the match,
(Will you have the truth?) whereof we see effect.
No sooner whisper ran he was arrived
Than up pops Curate Carlo, a brisk lad,
Who never lets a good occasion slip,
And volunteers improving the event.
We looked he 'd give the history's self some help,
Treat us to how the wife's confession went
(This morning she confessed her crime, we know)
And, maybe, throw in something of the Priest —
If he 's not ordered back, punished anew,
The gallant, Caponsacchi, Lucifer
I' the garden where Pompilia, Eve-like, lured
Her Adam Guido to his fault and fall.
Think you we got a sprig of speech akin
To this from Carlo, with the Cardinal there?
Too wary he was, too widely awake, I trow.
He did the murder in a dozen words;
Then said that all such outrages crop forth
I' the course of nature when Molinos' tares
Are sown for wheat, flourish and choke the Church:
So slid on to the abominable sect
And the philosophic sin — we 've heard all that,
And the Cardinal too, (who book-made on the same)
But, for the murder, left it where he found.
Oh but he 's quick, the Curate, minds his game!
And, after all, we have the main o' the fact:
Case could not well be simpler, — mapped, as it were,
We follow the murder's maze from source to sea,
By the red line, past mistake: one sees indeed
Not only how all was and must have been,
But cannot other than be to the end of time.

Turn out here by the Ruspoli ! Do you hold
Guido was so prodigiously to blame ?
A certain cousin of yours has told you so ?
Exactly ! Here 's a friend shall set you right,
Let him but have the handsel of your ear.

These wretched Comparini were once gay
And galliard, of the modest middle class :
Born in this quarter seventy years ago
And married young, they lived the accustomed life,
Citizens as they were of good repute :
And, childless, naturally took their ease
With only their two selves to care about
And use the wealth for : wealthy is the word,
Since Pietro was possessed of house and land —
And specially one house, when good days smiled,
In Via Vittoria, the aspectable street
Where he lived mainly ; but another house
Of less pretension did he buy betimes,
The villa, meant for jaunts and jollity,
I' the Pauline district, to be private there —
Just what puts murder in an enemy's head.
Moreover, — here 's the worm i' the core, the germ
O' the rottenness and ruin which arrived, —
He owned some usufruct, had moneys' use
Lifelong, but to determine with his life
In heirs' default : so, Pietro craved an heir,
(The story always old and always new)
Shut his fool's-eyes fast on the visible good
And wealth for certain, opened them owl-wide
On fortune's sole piece of forgetfulness,
The child that should have been and would not be.

Hence, seventeen years ago, conceive his glee
When first Violante, 'twixt a smile and blush,

With touch of agitation proper too,
Announced that, spite of her unpromising age,
The miracle would in time be manifest,
An heir's birth was to happen : and it did.
Somehow or other, — how, all in good time !
By a trick, a sleight of hand you are to hear, —
A child was born, Pompilia, for his joy,
Plaything at once and prop, a fairy-gift,
A saints' grace or, say, grant of the good God, —
A fiddle-pin's end ! What imbeciles are we !
Look now : if some one could have prophesied,
" For love of you, for liking to your wife,
I undertake to crush a snake I spy
Settling itself i' the soft of both your breasts.
Give me yon babe to strangle painlessly!
She 'll soar to the safe : you 'll have your crying out,
Then sleep, then wake, then sleep, then end your days
In peace and plenty, mixed with mild regret,
Thirty years hence when Christmas takes old folk " —
How had old Pietro sprung up, crossed himself,
And kicked the conjurer ! Whereas you and I,
Being wise with after-wit, had clapped our hands ;
Nay, added, in the old fool's interest,
" Strangle the black-eyed babe, so far so good,
But on condition you relieve the man
O' the wife and throttle him Violante too —
She is the mischief ! "

We had hit the mark.
She, whose trick brought the babe into the world,
She it was, when the babe was grown a girl,
Judged a new trick should reinforce the old,
Send vigor to the lie now somewhat spent
By twelve years' service ; lest Eve's rule decline

Over this Adam of hers, whose cabbage-plot
Throve dubiously since turned fools'-paradise,
Spite of a nightingale on every stump.
Pietro's estate was dwindling day by day,
While he, rapt far above such mundane care,
Crawled all-fours with his baby pick-a-back,
Sat at serene cats'-cradle with his child,
Or took the measured tallness, top to toe,
Of what was grown a great girl twelve years old :
Till sudden at the door a tap discreet,
A visitor's premonitory cough,
And poverty had reached him in her rounds.

This came when he was past the working-time,
Had learned to dandle and forgot to dig,
And who must but Violante cast about,
Contrive and task that head of hers again ?
She who had caught one fish, could make that catch
A bigger still, in angler's policy :
So, with an angler's mercy for the bait,
Her minnow was set wriggling on its barb
And tossed to mid-stream ; which means, this grown girl
With the great eyes and bounty of black hair
And first crisp youth that tempts a jaded taste,
Was whisked i' the way of a certain man, who snapped.

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine
Was head of an old noble house enough,
Not over-rich, you can't have everything,
But such a man as riches rub against,
Readily stick to, — one with a right to them
Born in the blood : 't was in his very brow
Always to knit itself against the world,
Beforehand so, when that world stinted due

Service and suit: the world ducks and defers.
As such folks do, he had come up to Rome
To better his fortune, and, since many years,
Was friend and follower of a cardinal;
Waiting the rather thus on providence
That a shrewd younger poorer brother yet,
The Abate Paolo, a regular priest,
Had long since tried his powers and found he swam
With the deftest on the Galilean pool:
But then he was a web-foot, free o' the wave,
And no ambiguous dab-chick hatched to strut,
Humbled by any fond attempt to swim
When fiercer fowl usurped his dunghill top —
A whole priest, Paolo, no mere piece of one
Like Guido tacked thus to the Church's tail!
Guido moreover, as the head o' the house,
Claiming the main prize, not the lesser luck,
The centre lily, no mere chickweed fringe.

He waited and learned waiting, thirty years;
Got promise, missed performance — what would you have?
No petty post rewards a nobleman
For spending youth in splendid lackey-work,
And there's concurrence for each rarer prize;
When that falls, rougher hand and readier foot
Push aside Guido spite of his black looks.
The end was, Guido, when the warning showed,
The first white hair i' the glass, gave up the game,
Determined on returning to his town,
Making the best of bad incurable,
Patching the old palace up and lingering there
The customary life out with his kin,
Where honor helps to spice the scanty bread.

Just as he trimmed his lamp and girt his loins
To go his journey and be wise at home,
In the right mood of disappointed worth,
Who but Violante sudden spied her prey
(Where was I with that angler-simile ?)
And threw her bait, Pompilia, where he sulked —
A gleam i' the gloom !

What if he gained thus much,
Wrung out this sweet drop from the bitter Past,
Bore off this rose-bud from the prickly brake
To justify such torn clothes and scratched hands,
And, after all, brought something back from Rome ?
Would not a wife serve at Arezzo well
To light the dark house, lend a look of youth
To the mother's face grown meagre, left alone
And famished with the emptiness of hope,
Old Donna Beatrice ? Wife you want
Would you play family-representative,
Carry you elder-brotherly, high and right
O'er what may prove the natural petulance
Of the third brother, younger, greedier still,
Girolamo, also a fledgeling priest,
Beginning life in turn with callow beak
Agape for luck, no luck had stopped and stilled.
Such were the pinks and grays about the bait
Persuaded Guido gulp down hook and all.

What constituted him so choice a catch,
You question ? Past his prime and poor beside !
Ask that of any she who knows the trade.
Why first, here was a nobleman with friends,
A palace one might run to and be safe
When presently the threatened fate should fall,
A big-browed master to block doorway up,

Parley with people bent on pushing by
And praying the mild Pietro quick clear scores :
Is birth a privilege and power or no ?
Also, — but judge of the result desired,
By the price paid and manner of the sale.
The Count was made woo, win and wed at once :
Asked, and was haled for answer, lest the heat
Should cool, to San Lorenzo, one blind eve,
And had Pompilia put into his arms
O' the sly there, by a hasty candle-blink,
With sanction of some priest-confederate
Properly paid to make short work and sure.

So did old Pietro's daughter change her style
For Guido Franceschini's lady-wife
Ere Guido knew it well ; and why this haste
And scramble and indecent secrecy ?
" Lest Pietro, all the while in ignorance,
Should get to learn, gainsay and break the match :
His peevishness had promptly put aside
Such honor and refused the proffered boon,
Pleased to become authoritative once.
She remedied the wilful man's mistake — "
Did our discreet Violante. Rather say,
Thus did she, lest the object of her game,
Guido the gulled one, give him but a chance,
A moment's respite, time for thinking twice,
Might count the cost before he sold himself,
And try the clink of coin they paid him with.

But coin paid, bargain struck and business done,
Once the clandestine marriage over thus,
All parties made perforce the best o' the fact ;
Pietro could play vast indignation off,

Be ignorant and astounded, dupe, poor soul,
Please you, of daughter, wife and son-in-law,
While Guido found himself in flagrant fault,
Must e'en do suit and service, soothe, subdue
A father not unreasonably chafed,
Bring him to terms by paying son's devoir.
Pleasant initiation !

The end, this :
Guido's broad back was saddled to bear all —
Pietro, Violante, and Pompilia too, —
Three lots cast confidently in one lap,
Three dead-weights with one arm to lift the three
Out of their limbo up to life again.
The Roman household was to strike fresh root
In a new soil, graced with a novel name,
Gilt with an alien glory, Aretine
Henceforth and never Roman any more,
By treaty and engagement ; thus it ran :
Pompilia's dowry for Pompilia's self
As a thing of course, — she paid her own expense ;
No loss nor gain there : but the couple, you see,
They, for their part, turned over first of all
Their fortune in its rags and rottenness
To Guido, fusion and confusion, he
And his with them and theirs, — whatever rag
With coin residuary fell on floor
When Brother Paolo's energetic shake
Should do the relics justice : since 't was thought,
Once vulnerable Pietro out of reach,
That, left at Rome as representative,
The Abate, backed by a potent patron here,
And otherwise with purple flushing him,
Might play a good game with the creditor,

Make up a moiety which, great or small,
Should go to the common stock — if anything,
Guido's, so far repayment of the cost
About to be, — and if, as looked more like,
Nothing, — why, all the nobler cost were his
Who guaranteed, for better or for worse,
To Pietro and Violante, house and home,
Kith and kin, with the pick of company
And life o' the fat o' the land while life should last.
How say you to the bargain at first blush?
Why did a middle-aged not-silly man
Show himself thus besotted all at once?
Quoth Solomon, one black eye does it all.

They went to Arezzo, — Pietro and his spouse,
With just the dusk o' the day of life to spend,
Eager to use the twilight, taste a treat,
Enjoy for once with neither stay nor stint
The luxury of lord-and-lady-ship,
And realize the stuff and nonsense long
A-simmer in their noddles; vent the fume
Born there and bred, the citizen's conceit
How fares nobility while crossing earth,
What rampart or invisible body-guard
Keeps off the taint of common life from such.
They had not fed for nothing on the tales
Of grandees who give banquets worthy Jove,
Spending gold as if Plutus paid a whim,
Served with obeisances as when . . . what God?
I 'm at the end of my tether; 't is enough
You understand what they came primed to see:
While Guido who should minister the sight,
Stay all this qualmish greediness of soul
With apples and with flagons — for his part,

Was set on life diverse as pole from pole :
Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, — what else
Was he just now awake from, sick and sage,
After the very debauch they would begin ? —
Suppose such stuff and nonsense really were.
That bubble, they were bent on blowing big,
He had blown already till he burst his cheeks,
And hence found soapsuds bitter to the tongue.
He hoped now to walk softly all his days
In soberness of spirit, if haply so,
Pinching and paring he might furnish forth
A frugal board, bare sustenance, no more,
Till times, that could not well grow worse, should mend.

Thus minded then, two parties mean to meet
And make each other happy. The first week,
And fancy strikes fact and explodes in full.
" This," shrieked the Comparini, " this the Count,
The palace, the signorial privilege,
The pomp and pageantry were promised us ?
For this have we exchanged our liberty,
Our competence, our darling of a child ?
To house as spectres in a sepulchre
Under this black stone-heap, the street's disgrace,
Grimmest as that is of the gruesome town,
And here pick garbage on a pewter plate
Or cough at verjuice dripped from earthenware ?
Oh Via Vittoria, oh the other place
I' the Pauline, did we give you up for this ?
Where 's the foregone housekeeping good and gay,
The neighborliness, the companionship,
The treat and feast when holidays came round,
The daily feast that seemed no treat at all,
Called common by the uncommon fools we were !

Even the sun that used to shine at Rome,
Where is it? Robbed and starved and frozen too,
We will have justice, justice if there be!"
Did not they shout, did not the town resound!
Guido's old lady-mother Beatrice,
Who since her husband, Count Tommaso's death,
Had held sole sway i' the house, — the doited crone
Slow to acknowledge, curtsey and abdicate, —
Was recognized of true novercal type,
Dragon and devil. His brother Girolamo
Came next in order: priest was he? The worse!
No way of winning him to leave his mumps
And help the laugh against old ancestry
And formal habits long since out of date,
Letting his youth be patterned on the mode
Approved of where Violante laid down law.
Or did he brighten up by way of change,
Dispose himself for affability?
The malapert, too complaisant by half
To the alarmed young novice of a bride!
Let him go buzz, betake himself elsewhere
Nor singe his fly-wings in the candle-flame!

Four months' probation of this purgatory,
Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counterblast,
The devil's self were sick of his own din;
And Pietro, after trumpeting huge wrongs
At church and market-place, pillar and post,
Square's corner, street's end, now the palace-step
And now the wine-house bench — while, on her side,
Violante up and down was voluble
In whatsoever pair of ears would perk
From goody, gossip, cater-cousin and sib,
Curious to peep at the inside of things

And catch in the act pretentious poverty
At its wits' end to keep appearance up,
Make both ends meet, — nothing the vulgar loves
Like what this couple pitched them right and left.
Then, their worst done that way, both struck tent, marched:
— Renounced their share o' the bargain, flung what dues
Guido was bound to pay, in Guido's face,
Left their hearts'-darling, treasure of the twain
And so forth, the poor inexperienced bride,
To her own devices, bade Arezzo rot,
Cursed life signorial, and sought Rome once more.

I see the comment ready on your lip,
"The better fortune, Guido's — free at least
By this defection of the foolish pair,
He could begin make profit in some sort
Of the young bride and the new quietness,
Lead his own life now, henceforth breathe unplagued."
Could he? You know the sex like Guido's self.
Learn the Violante-nature!

Once in Rome,
By way of helping Guido lead such life,
Her first act to inaugurate return
Was, she got pricked in conscience: Jubilee
Gave her the hint. Our Pope, as kind as just,
Attained his eighty years, announced a boon
Should make us bless the fact, held Jubilee —
Short shrift, prompt pardon for the light offence,
And no rough dealing with the regular crime
So this occasion were not suffered slip —
Otherwise, sins commuted as before,
Without the least abatement in the price.

Now, who had thought it? All this while, it seems,
Our sage Violante had a sin of a sort
She must compound for now or not at all.
Now be the ready riddance! She confessed
Pompilia was a fable not a fact:
She never bore a child in her whole life.
Had this child been a changeling, that were grace
In some degree, exchange is hardly theft,
You take your stand on truth ere leap your lie:
Here was all lie, no touch of truth at all,
All the lie hers — not even Pietro guessed
He was as childless still as twelve years since.
The babe had been a find i' the filth-heap, Sir,
Catch from the kennel! There was found at Rome,
Down in the deepest of our social dregs,
A woman who professed the wanton's trade
Under the requisite thin coverture,
Communis meretrix and washer-wife:
The creature thus conditioned found by chance
Motherhood like a jewel in the muck,
And straightway either trafficked with her prize
Or listened to the tempter and let be, —
Made pact abolishing her place and part
In womankind, beast-fellowship indeed.

She sold this babe eight months before its birth
To our Violante, Pietro's honest spouse,
Well-famed and widely-instanced as that crown
To the husband, virtue in a woman's shape.
She it was, bought, paid for, passed off the thing
As very flesh and blood and child of her
Despite the flagrant fifty years, — and why?
Partly to please old Pietro, fill his cup
With wine at the late hour when lees are left,

And send him from life's feast rejoicingly,—
Partly to cheat the rightful heirs, agape,
Each uncle's cousin's brother's son of him,
For that same principal of the usufruct
It vext him he must die and leave behind.

Such was the sin had come to be confessed.
Which of the tales, the first or last, was true?
Did she so sin once, or, confessing now,
Sin for the first time? Either way you will.
One sees a reason for the cheat: one sees
A reason for a cheat in owning cheat
Where no cheat had been. What of the revenge?
What prompted the contrition all at once,
Made the avowal easy, the shame slight?
Why, prove they but Pompilia not their child,
No child, no dowry! this, supposed their child,
Had claimed what this, shown alien to their blood,
Claimed nowise: Guido's claim was through his wife,
Null then and void with hers. The biter bit,
Do you see! For such repayment of the past,
One might conceive the penitential pair
Ready to bring their case before the courts,
Publish their infamy to all the world
And, arm in arm, go chuckling thence content.

Is this your view? 'T was Guido's anyhow
And colorable: he came forward then,
Protested in his very bride's behalf
Against this lie and all it led to, least
Of all the loss o' the dowry; no! From her
And him alike he would expunge the blot,
Erase the brand of such a bestial birth,
Participate in no hideous heritage
Gathered from the gutter to be garnered up

And glorified in a palace. Peter and Paul!
But that who likes may look upon the pair
Exposed in yonder church, and show his skill
By saying which is eye and which is mouth
Thro' those stabs thick and threefold, — but for that —
A strong word on the liars and their lie
Might crave expression and obtain it, Sir!
— Though prematurely, since there 's more to come,
More that will shake your confidence in things
Your cousin tells you, — may I be so bold?

This makes the first act of the farce, — anon
The sombre element comes stealing in
Till all is black or blood-red in the piece.
Guido, thus made a laughing-stock abroad,
A proverb for the market-place at home,
Left alone with Pompilia now, this graft
So reputable on his ancient stock,
This plague-seed set to fester his sound flesh,
What does the Count? Revenge him on his wife?
Unfasten at all risks to rid himself
The noisome lazar-badge, fall foul of fate,
And, careless whether the poor rag was 'ware
O' the part it played, or helped unwittingly,
Bid it go burn and leave his frayed flesh free?
Plainly, did Guido open both doors wide,
Spurn thence the cur-cast creature and clear scores
As man might, tempted in extreme like this?
No, birth and breeding, and compassion too
Saved her such scandal. She was young, he thought,
Not privy to the treason, punished most
I' the proclamation of it; why make her
A party to the crime she suffered by?
Then the black eyes were now her very own,

Not any more Violante's: let her live,
Lose in a new air, under a new sun,
The taint of the imputed parentage
Truly or falsely, take no more the touch
Of Pietro and his partner anyhow!
All might go well yet.

So she thought, herself,
It seems, since what was her first act and deed
When news came how these kindly ones at Rome
Had stripped her naked to amuse the world
With spots here, spots there and spots everywhere?
— For I should tell you that they noised abroad
Not merely the main scandal of her birth,
But slanders written, printed, published wide,
Pamphlets which set forth all the pleasantry
Of how the promised glory was a dream,
The power a bubble, and the wealth — why, dust.
There was a picture, painted to the life,
Of those rare doings, that superlative
Initiation in magnificence
Conferred on a poor Roman family
By favor of Arezzo and her first
And famousest, the Franceschini there.
You had the Countship holding head aloft
Bravely although bespattered, shifts and straits
In keeping out o' the way o' the wheels o' the world,
The comic of those home-contrivances
When the old lady-mother's wit was taxed
To find six clamorous mouths in food more real
Than fruit plucked off the cobwebbed family-tree,
Or acorns shed from its gilt mouldered frame —
Cold glories served up with stale fame for sauce.
What, I ask, — when the drunkenness of hate

Hiccuped return for hospitality,
Befouled the table they had feasted on,
Or say, — God knows I 'll not prejudge the case, —
Grievances thus distorted, magnified,
Colored by quarrel into calumny, —
What side did our Pompilia first espouse?
Her first deliberate measure was — she wrote,
Pricked by some loyal impulse, straight to Rome
And her husband's brother the Abate there,
Who, having managed to effect the match,
Might take men's censure for its ill success.
She made a clean breast also in her turn,
And qualified the couple properly,
Since whose departure, hell, she said, was heaven,
And the house, late distracted by their peals,
Quiet as Carmel where the lilies live.
Herself had oftentimes complained: but why?
All her complaints had been their prompting, tales
Trumped up, devices to this very end.
Their game had been to thwart her husband's love
And cross his will, malign his words and ways,
To reach this issue, furnish this pretence
For impudent withdrawal from their bond, —
Theft, indeed murder, since they meant no less
Whose last injunction to her simple self
Had been — what parents'-precept do you think?
That she should follow after with all speed,
Fly from her husband's house clandestinely,
Join them at Rome again, but first of all
Pick up a fresh companion in her flight,
So putting youth and beauty to fit use, —
Some gay dare-devil cloak-and-rapier spark
Capable of adventure, — helped by whom
She, some fine eve when lutes were in the air,

Having put poison in the posset-cup,
Laid hands on money, jewels and the like,
And, to conceal the thing with more effect,
By way of parting benediction too,
Fired the house, — one would finish famously
I' the tumult, slip out, scurry off and away
And turn up merrily at home once more.
Fact this, and not a dream o' the devil, Sir!
And more than this, a fact none dare dispute,
Word for word, such a letter did she write,
And such the Abate read, nor simply read
But gave all Rome to ruminate upon,
In answer to such charges as, I say,
The couple sought to be beforehand with.

The cause thus carried to the courts at Rome,
Guido away, the Abate had no choice
But stand forth, take his absent brother's part,
Defend the honor of himself beside.
He made what head he might against the pair,
Maintained Pompilia's birth legitimate
And all her rights intact — hers, Guido's now:
And so far by his policy turned their flank,
(The enemy being beforehand in the place)
That, — though the courts allowed the cheat for fact,
Suffered Violante to parade her shame,
Publish her infamy to heart's content,
And let the tale o' the feigned birth pass for proved, —
Yet they stopped there, refused to intervene
And dispossess the innocents, befooled
By gifts o' the guilty, at guilt's new caprice.
They would not take away the dowry now
Wrongfully given at first, nor bar at all
Succession to the aforesaid usufruct,

Established on a fraud, nor play the game
Of Pietro's child and now not Pietro's child
As it might suit the gamester's purpose. Thus
Was justice ever ridiculed in Rome:
Such be the double verdicts favored here
Which send away both parties to a suit
Nor puffed up nor cast down, — for each a crumb
Of right, for neither of them the whole loaf.
Whence, on the Comparini's part, appeal —
Counter-appeal on Guido's, — that 's the game:
And so the matter stands, even to this hour,
Bandied as balls are in a tennis-court,
And so might stand, unless some heart broke first,
Till doomsday.

Leave it thus, and now revert
To the old Arezzo whence we moved to Rome.
We 've had enough o' the parents, false or true,
Now for a touch o' the daughter's quality.
The start 's fair henceforth, every obstacle
Out of the young wife's footpath, she 's alone,
Left to walk warily now: how does she walk?
Why, once a dwelling's threshold marked and crossed
In rubric by the enemy on his rounds
As eligible, as fit place of prey,
Baffle him henceforth, keep him out who can!
Stop up the door at the first hint of hoof,
Presently at the window taps a horn,
And Satan 's by your fireside, never fear!
Pompilia, left alone now, found herself;
Found herself young too, sprightly, fair enough,
Matched with a husband old beyond his age
(Though that was something like four times her own)
Because of cares past, present and to come:

Found too the house dull and its inmates dead,
So, looked outside for light and life.
And love
Did in a trice turn up with life and light, —
The man with the aureole, sympathy made flesh,
The all-consoling Caponsacchi, Sir!
A priest — what else should the consoler be?
With goodly shoulderblade and proper leg,
A portly make and a symmetric shape,
And curls that clustered to the tonsure quite.
This was a bishop in the bud, and now
A canon full-blown so far: priest, and priest
Nowise exorbitantly overworked,
The courtly Christian, not so much Saint Paul
As a saint of Cæsar's household: there posed he
Sending his god-glance after his shot shaft,
Apollos turned Apollo, while the snake
Pompilia writhed transfixed through all her spires.
He, not a visitor at Guido's house,
Scarce an acquaintance, but in prime request
With the magnates of Arezzo, was seen here,
Heard there, felt everywhere in Guido's path
If Guido's wife's path be her husband's too.
Now he threw comfits at the theatre
Into her lap, — what harm in Carnival?
Now he pressed close till his foot touched her gown,
His hand brushed hers, — how help on promenade?
And, ever on weighty business, found his steps
Incline to a certain haunt of doubtful fame
Which fronted Guido's palace by mere chance;
While — how do accidents sometimes combine! —
Pompilia chose to cloister up her charms
Just in a chamber that o'erlooked the street,
Sat there to pray, or peep thence at mankind.

This passage of arms and wits amused the town.
At last the husband lifted eyebrow, — bent
On day-book and the study how to wring
Half the due vintage from the worn-out vines
At the villa, tease a quarter the old rent
From the farmstead, tenants swore would tumble soon,—
Pricked up his ear a-singing day and night
With "ruin, ruin;" — and so surprised at last —
Why, what else but a titter? Up he jumps.
Back to mind come those scratchings at the grange,
Prints of the paw about the outhouse; rife
In his head at once again are word and wink,
Mum here and *budget* there, the smell o' the fox,
The musk o' the gallant. "Friends, there 's falseness here!"

The proper help of friends in such a strait
Is waggery, the world over. Laugh him free
O' the regular jealous-fit that 's incident
To all old husbands that wed brisk young wives,
And he 'll go duly docile all his days.
"Somebody courts your wife, Count? Where and when?
How and why? Mere horn-madness: have a care!
Your lady loves her own room, sticks to it,
Locks herself in for hours, you say yourself.
And — what, it 's Caponsacchi means you harm?
The Canon? We caress him, he 's the world's,
A man of such acceptance — never dream,
Though he were fifty times the fox you fear,
He 'd risk his brush for your particular chick,
When the wide town 's his hen-roost! Fie o' the fool!"
So they dispensed their comfort of a kind.
Guido at last cried "Something is in the air,

Under the earth, some plot against my peace.
The trouble of eclipse hangs overhead;
How it should come of that officious orb
Your Canon in my system, you must say:
I say — that from the pressure of this spring
Began the chime and interchange of bells,
Ever one whisper, and one whisper more,
And just one whisper for the silvery last,
Till all at once a-row the bronze-throats burst
Into a larum both significant
And sinister: stop it I must and will.
Let Caponsacchi take his hand away
From the wire! — disport himself in other paths
Than lead precisely to my palace-gate, —
Look where he likes except one window's way
Where, cheek on hand, and elbow set on sill,
Happens to lean and say her litanies
Every day and all day long, just my wife —
Or wife and Caponsacchi may fare the worse!"

Admire the man's simplicity, "I'll do this,
I'll not have that, I'll punish and prevent!" —
'T is easy saying. But to a fray, you see,
Two parties go. The badger shows his teeth:
The fox nor lies down sheep-like nor dares fight.
Oh, the wife knew the appropriate warfare well,
The way to put suspicion to the blush!
At first hint of remonstrance, up and out
I' the face of the world, you found her: she could speak,
State her case, — Franceschini was a name,
Guido had his full share of foes and friends —
Why should not she call these to arbitrate?
She bade the Governor do governance,
Cried out on the Archbishop, — why, there now,

Take him for sample! Three successive times,
Had he to reconduct her by main-force
From where she took her station opposite
His shut door, — on the public steps thereto,
Wringing her hands, when he came out to see,
And shrieking all her wrongs forth at his foot, —
Back to the husband and the house she fled:
Judge if that husband warmed him in the face
Of friends or frowned on foes as heretofore!
Judge if he missed the natural grin of folk,
Or lacked the customary compliment
Of cap and bells, the luckless husband's fit!

So it went on and on till — who was right?
One merry April morning, Guido woke
After the cuckoo, so late, near noonday,
With an inordinate yawning of the jaws,
Ears plugged, eyes gummed together, palate, tongue
And teeth one mud-paste made of poppy-milk;
And found his wife flown, his scritoire the worse
For a rummage, — jewelry that was, was not,
Some money there had made itself wings too, —
The door lay wide and yet the servants slept
Sound as the dead, or dosed which does as well.
In short, Pompilia, she who, candid soul,
Had not so much as spoken all her life
To the Canon, nay, so much as peeped at him
Between her fingers while she prayed in church, —
This lamb-like innocent of fifteen years
(Such she was grown to by this time of day)
Had simply put an opiate in the drink
Of the whole household overnight, and then
Got up and gone about her work secure,
Laid hand on this waif and the other stray,

Spoiled the Philistine and marched out of doors
In company of the Canon who, Lord's love,
What with his daily duty at the church,
Nightly devoir where ladies congregate,
Had something else to mind, assure yourself,
Beside Pompilia, paragon though she be,
Or notice if her nose were sharp or blunt!
Well, anyhow, albeit impossible,
Both of them were together jollily
Jaunting it Rome-ward, half-way there by this,
While Guido was left go and get undrugged,
Gather his wits up, groaningly give thanks
When neighbors crowded round him to condole.

"Ah," quoth a gossip, "well I mind me now,
The Count did always say he thought he felt
He feared as if this very chance might fall!
And when a man of fifty finds his corns
Ache and his joints throb, and foresees a storm,
Though neighbors laugh and say the sky is clear,
Let us henceforth believe him weatherwise!"
Then was the story told, I 'll cut you short:
All neighbors knew: no mystery in the world.
The lovers left at nightfall — overnight
Had Caponsacchi come to carry off
Pompilia, — not alone, a friend of his,
One Guillichini, the more conversant
With Guido's housekeeping that he was just
A cousin of Guido's and might play a prank —
(Have not you too a cousin that 's a wag?)
—Lord and a Canon also,—what would you have?
Such are the red-clothed milk-swollen poppy-heads
That stand and stiffen 'mid the wheat o' the Church! —
This worthy came to aid, abet his best.

And so the house was ransacked, booty bagged,
The lady led downstairs and out of doors
Guided and guarded till, the city passed,
A carriage lay convenient at the gate.
Good-bye to the friendly Canon; the loving one
Could peradventure do the rest himself.
In jumps Pompilia, after her the priest,
"Whip, driver! Money makes the mare to go,
And we've a bagful. Take the Roman road!"
So said the neighbors. This was eight hours since.

Guido heard all, swore the befitting oaths,
Shook off the relics of his poison-drench,
Got horse, was fairly started in pursuit
With never a friend to follow, found the track
Fast enough, 't was the straight Perugia way,
Trod soon upon their very heels, too late
By a minute only at Camoscia, reached
Chiusi, Foligno, ever the fugitives
Just ahead, just out as he galloped in,
Getting the good news ever fresh and fresh,
Till, lo, at the last stage of all, last post
Before Rome, — as we say, in sight of Rome
And safety (there's impunity at Rome
For priests, you know) at — what's the little place? —
What some call Castelnuovo, some just call
The Osteria, because o' the post-house inn,
There, at the journey's all but end, it seems,
Triumph deceived them and undid them both,
Secure they might foretaste felicity
Nor fear surprisal: so, they were surprised.
There did they halt at early evening, there
Did Guido overtake them: 't was day-break;
He came in time enough, not time too much,

Since in the courtyard stood the Canon's self
Urging the drowsy stable-grooms to haste
Harness the horses, have the journey end,
The trifling four-hours'-running, so reach Rome.
And the other runaway, the wife? Upstairs,
Still on the couch where she had spent the night,
One couch in one room, and one room for both.
So gained they six hours, so were lost thereby.

Sir, what 's the sequel? Lover and beloved
Fall on their knees? No impudence serves here?
They beat their breasts and beg for easy death,
Confess this, that and the other? — anyhow
Confess there wanted not some likelihood
To the supposition so preposterous,
That, O Pompilia, thy sequestered eyes
Had noticed, straying o'er the prayerbook's edge,
More of the Canon than that black his coat,
Buckled his shoes were, broad his hat of brim:
And that, O Canon, thy religious care
Had breathed too soft a *benedicite*
To banish trouble from a lady's breast
So lonely and so lovely, nor so lean!
This you expect? Indeed, then, much you err.
Not to such ordinary end as this
Had Caponsacchi flung the cassock far,
Doffed the priest, donned the perfect cavalier.
The die was cast: over shoes over boots:
And just as she, I presently shall show,
Pompilia, soon looked Helen to the life,
Recumbent upstairs in her pink and white,
So, in the inn-yard, bold as 't were Troy-town,
There strutted Paris in correct costume,
Cloak, cap and feather, no appointment missed,

Even to a wicked-looking sword at side,
He seemed to find and feel familiar at.
Nor wanted words as ready and as big
As the part he played, the bold abashless one.
"I interposed to save your wife from death,
Yourself from shame, the true and only shame:
Ask your own conscience else! — or, failing that,
What I have done I answer, anywhere,
Here, if you will; you see I have a sword:
Or, since I have a tonsure as you taunt,
At Rome, by all means, — priests to try a priest.
Only, speak where your wife's voice can reply!"
And then he fingered at the sword again.
So, Guido called, in aid and witness both,
The Public Force. The Commissary came,
Officers also; they secured the priest;
Then, for his more confusion, mounted up
With him, a guard on either side, the stair
To the bed-room where still slept or feigned a sleep
His paramour and Guido's wife: in burst
The company and bade her wake and rise.

Her defence? This. She woke, saw, sprang upright
I' the midst and stood as terrible as truth,
Sprang to her husband's side, caught at the sword
That hung there useless, — since they held each hand
O' the lover, had disarmed him properly, —
And in a moment out flew the bright thing
Full in the face of Guido: but for help
O' the guards who held her back and pinioned her
With pains enough, she had finished you my tale
With a flourish of red all round it, pinked her man
Prettily; but she fought them one to six.
They stopped that, — but her tongue continued free:

She spat forth such invective at her spouse,
O'erfrothed him with such foam of murderer,
Thief, pandar — that the popular tide soon turned,
The favor of the very *sbirri*, straight
Ebbed from the husband, set toward his wife,
People cried "Hands off, pay a priest respect!"
And "persecuting fiend" and "martyred saint"
Began to lead a measure from lip to lip.

But facts are facts and flinch not; stubborn things,
And the question "Prithee, friend, how comes my purse
I' the poke of you?" — admits of no reply.
Here was a priest found out in masquerade,
A wife caught playing truant if no more;
While the Count, mortified in mien enough,
And, nose to face, an added palm in length,
Was plain writ "husband" every piece of him:
Capture once made, release could hardly be.
Beside, the prisoners both made appeal,
"Take us to Rome!"
Taken to Rome they were;
The husband trooping after, piteously,
Tail between legs, no talk of triumph now —
No honor set firm on its feet once more
On two dead bodies of the guilty, — nay,
No dubious salve to honor's broken pate
From chance that, after all, the hurt might seem
A skin-deep matter, scratch that leaves no scar:
For Guido's first search, — ferreting, poor soul,
Here, there and everywhere in the vile place
Abandoned to him when their backs were turned,
Found, — furnishing a last and best regale, —
All the love-letters bandied 'twixt the pair
Since the first timid trembling into life

O' the love-star till its stand at fiery full.
Mad prose, mad verse, fears, hopes, triumph, despair,
Avowal, disclaimer, plans, dates, names, — was naught
Wanting to prove, if proof consoles at all,
That this had been but the fifth act o' the piece
Whereof the due proemium, months ago
These playwrights had put forth, and ever since
Matured the middle, added 'neath his nose.
He might go cross himself: the case was clear.

Therefore to Rome with the clear case; there plead
Each party its best, and leave law do each right,
Let law shine forth and show, as God in heaven,
Vice prostrate, virtue pedestalled at last,
The triumph of truth! What else shall glad our gaze
When once authority has knit the brow
And set the brain behind it to decide
Between the wolf and sheep turned litigants?
"This is indeed a business!" law shook head:
"A husband charges hard things on a wife,
The wife as hard o' the husband: whose fault here?
A wife that flies her husband's house, does wrong:
The male friend's interference looks amiss,
Lends a suspicion: but suppose the wife,
On the other hand, be jeopardized at home —
Nay, that she simply hold, ill-groundedly,
An apprehension she is jeopardized, —
And further, if the friend partake the fear,
And, in a commendable charity
Which trusteth all, trust her that she mistrusts, —
What do they but obey law — natural law?
Pretence may this be and a cloak for sin,
And circumstances that concur i' the close
Hint as much, loudly — yet scarce loud enough

To drown the answer 'strange may yet be true:'
Innocence often looks like guiltiness.
The accused declare that in thought, word and deed,
Innocent were they both from first to last
As male-babe haply laid by female-babe
At church on edge of the baptismal font
Together for a minute, perfect-pure.
Difficult to believe, yet possible,
As witness Joseph, the friend's patron-saint.
The night at the inn — there charity nigh chokes
Ere swallow what they both asseverate;
Though down the gullet faith may feel it go,
When mindful of what flight fatigued the flesh
Out of its faculty and fleshliness,
Subdued it to the soul, as saints assure:
So long a flight necessitates a fall
On the first bed, though in a lion's den,
And the first pillow, though the lion's back:
Difficult to believe, yet possible.
Last come the letters' bundled beastliness —
Authority repugns give glance to — nay,
Turns head, and almost lets her whip-lash fall;
Yet here a voice cries 'Respite!' from the clouds —
The accused, both in a tale, protest, disclaim,
Abominate the horror: 'Not my hand'
Asserts the friend — 'Nor mine' chimes in the wife,
'Seeing I have no hand, nor write at all.'
Illiterate — for she goes on to ask,
What if the friend did pen now verse now prose,
Commend it to her notice now and then?
'T was pearls to swine: she read no more than wrote,
And kept no more than read, for as they fell
She ever brushed the burr-like things away,
Or, better, burned them, quenched the fire in smoke.

As for this fardel, filth and foolishness,
She sees it now the first time: burn it too!
While for his part the friend vows ignorance
Alike of what bears his name and bears hers:
'T is forgery, a felon's masterpiece,
And, as 't is said the fox still finds the stench,
Home-manufacture and the husband's work.
Though he confesses, the ingenuous friend,
That certain missives, letters of a sort,
Flighty and feeble, which assigned themselves
To the wife, no less have fallen, far too oft,
In his path: wherefrom he understood just this —
That were they verily the lady's own,
Why, she who penned them, since he never saw
Save for one minute the mere face of her,
Since never had there been the interchange
Of word with word between them all their life,
Why, she must be the fondest of the frail,
And fit, she for the '*apage*' he flung,
Her letters for the flame they went to feed!
But, now he sees her face and hears her speech,
Much he repents him if, in fancy-freak
For a moment the minutest measurable,
He coupled her with the first flimsy word
O' the self-spun fabric some mean spider-soul
Furnished forth: stop his films and stamp on him!
Never was such a tangled knottiness,
But thus authority cuts the Gordian through,
And mark how her decision suits the need!
Here 's troublesomeness, scandal on both sides,
Plenty of fault to find, no absolute crime:
Let each side own its fault and make amends!
What does a priest in cavalier's attire
Consorting publicly with vagrant wives

In quarters close as the confessional,
Though innocent of harm? 'T is harm enough:
Let him pay it, — say, be relegate a good
Three years, to spend in some place not too far,
Nor yet too near, midway 'twixt near and far,
Rome and Arezzo, — Civita we choose,
Where he may lounge away time, live at large,
Find out the proper function of a priest,
Nowise an exile, — that were punishment, —
But one our love thus keeps out of harm's way
Not more from the husband's anger than, mayhap
His own . . . say, indiscretion, waywardness,
And wanderings when Easter eves grow warm.
For the wife, — well, our best step to take with her,
On her own showing, were to shift her root
From the old cold shade and unhappy soil
Into a generous ground that fronts the south
Where, since her callow soul, a-shiver late,
Craved simply warmth and called mere passers-by
To the rescue, she should have her fill of shine.
Do house and husband hinder and not help?
Why then, forget both and stay here at peace,
Come into our community, enroll
Herself along with those good Convertites,
Those sinners saved, those Magdalens re-made,
Accept their ministration, well bestow
Her body and patiently possess her soul,
Until we see what better can be done.
Last for the husband: if his tale prove true,
Well is he rid of two domestic plagues —
Both wife that ailed, do whatsoever he would,
And friend of hers that undertook the cure.
See, what a double load we lift from breast!
Off he may go, return, resume old life,

Laugh at the priest here and Pompilia there
In limbo each and punished for their pains,
And grateful tell the inquiring neighborhood —
In Rome, no wrong but has its remedy."
The case was closed. Now, am I fair or no
In what I utter? Do I state the facts,
Having forechosen a side? I promised you!

The Canon Caponsacchi, then, was sent
To change his garb, re-trim his tonsure, tie
The clerkly silk round, every plait correct,
Make the impressive entry on his place
Of relegation, thrill his Civita,
As Ovid, a like sufferer in the cause,
Planted a primrose-patch by Pontus: where, —
What with much culture of the sonnet-stave
And converse with the aborigines,
Soft savagery of eyes unused to roll
And hearts that all awry went pit-a-pat
And wanted setting right in charity, —
What were a couple of years to while away?
Pompilia, as enjoined, betook herself
To the aforesaid Convertites, soft sisterhood
In Via Lungara, where the light ones live,
Spin, pray, then sing like linnets o'er the flax.
"Anywhere, anyhow, out of my husband's house
Is heaven," cried she, — was therefore suited so.
But for Count Guido Franceschini, he —
The injured man thus righted — found no heaven
I' the house when he returned there, I engage,
Was welcomed by the city turned upside down
In a chorus of inquiry. "What, back — you?
And no wife? Left her with the Penitents?
Ah, being young and pretty, 't were a shame

To have her whipped in public: leave the job
To the priests who understand! Such priests as yours —
(Pontifex Maximus whipped Vestals once)
Our madcap Caponsacchi: think of him!
So, he fired up, showed fight and skill of fence?
Ay, you drew also, but you did not fight!
The wiser, 't is a word and a blow with him,
True Caponsacchi, of old Head-i'-the-Sack
That fought at Fiesole ere Florence was:
He had done enough, to firk you were too much.
And did the little lady menace you,
Make at your breast with your own harmless sword?
The spitfire! Well, thank God you 're safe and sound,
Have kept the sixth commandment whether or no
The lady broke the seventh: I only wish
I were as saint-like, could contain me so.
I, the poor sinner, fear I should have left
Sir Priest no nose-tip to turn up at me!"
You, Sir, who listen but interpose no word,
Ask yourself, had you borne a baiting thus?
Was it enough to make a wise man mad?
Oh, but I 'll have your verdict at the end!

Well, not enough, it seems: such mere hurt falls,
Frets awhile, aches long, then grows less and less,
And so gets done with. Such was not the scheme
O' the pleasant Comparini: on Guido's wound
Ever in due succession, drop by drop,
Came slow distilment from the alembic here
Set on to simmer by Canidian hate,
Corrosives keeping the man's misery raw.
First fire-drop, — when he thought to make the best
O' the bad, to wring from out the sentence passed,
Poor, pitiful, absurd although it were,

Yet what might eke him out result enough
And make it worth while to have had the right
And not the wrong i' the matter judged at Rome.
Inadequate her punishment, no less
Punished in some slight sort his wife had been;
Then, punished for adultery, what else?
On such admitted crime he thought to seize,
And institute procedure in the courts
Which cut corruption of this kind from man,
Cast loose a wife proved loose and castaway:
He claimed in due form a divorce at least.

This claim was met now by a counterclaim:
Pompilia sought divorce from bed and board
Of Guido, whose outrageous cruelty,
Whose mother's malice and whose brother's hate
Were just the white o' the charge, such dreadful depths
Blackened its centre, — hints of worse than hate,
Love from that brother, by that Guido's guile,
That mother's prompting. Such reply was made,
So was the engine loaded, wound up, sprung
On Guido, who received bolt full in breast;
But no less bore up, giddily perhaps.
He had the Abate Paolo still in Rome,
Brother and friend and fighter on his side:
They rallied in a measure, met the foe
Manlike, joined battle in the public courts,
As if to shame supine law from her sloth:
And waiting her award, let beat the while
Arezzo's banter, Rome's buffoonery,
On this ear and on that ear, deaf alike,
Safe from worse outrage. Let a scorpion nip,
And never mind till he contorts his tail!
But there was sting i' the creature; thus it struck.

Guido had thought in his simplicity —
That lying declaration of remorse,
That story of the child which was no child
And motherhood no motherhood at all,
— That even this sin might have its sort of good
Inasmuch as no question more could be, —
Call it false, call the story true, — no claim
Of further parentage pretended now :
The parents had abjured all right, at least,
I' the woman owned his wife : to plead right still
Were to declare the abjuration false :
He was relieved from any fear henceforth
Their hands might touch, their breath defile again
Pompilia with his name upon her yet.
Well, no : the next news was, Pompilia's health
Demanded change after full three long weeks
Spent in devotion with the Sisterhood, —
Which rendered sojourn, — so the court opined, —
Too irksome, since the convent's walls were high
And windows narrow, nor was air enough
Nor light enough, but all looked prison-like,
The last thing which had come in the court's head.
Propose a new expedient therefore, — this !
She had demanded — had obtained indeed,
By intervention of her pitying friends
Or perhaps lovers — (beauty in distress,
Beauty whose tale is the town-talk beside,
Never lacks friendship's arm about her neck) —
Obtained remission of the penalty,
Permitted transfer to some private place
Where better air, more light, new food might soothe —
Incarcerated (call it, all the same)
At some sure friend's house she must keep inside,
Be found in at requirement fast enough, —

Domus pro carcere, in Roman style.
You keep the house i' the main, as most men do
And all good women: but free otherwise,
Should friends arrive, to lodge them and what not?
And such a *domum*, such a dwelling-place,
Having all Rome to choose from, where chose she?
What house obtained Pompilia's preference?
Why, just the Comparini's — just, do you mark,
Theirs who renounced all part and lot in her
So long as Guido could be robbed thereby,
And only fell back on relationship
And found their daughter safe and sound again
When that might surelier stab him: yes, the pair
Who, as I told you, first had baited hook
With this poor gilded fly Pompilia-thing,
Then caught the fish, pulled Guido to the shore
And gutted him, — now found a further use
For the bait, would trail the gauze wings yet again
I' the way of what new swimmer passed their stand.
They took Pompilia to their hiding-place —
Not in the heart of Rome as formerly,
Under observance, subject to control —
But out o' the way, — or in the way, who knows?
That blind mute villa lurking by the gate
At Via Paulina, not so hard to miss
By the honest eye, easy enough to find
In twilight by marauders: where perchance
Some muffled Caponsacchi might repair,
Employ odd moments when he too tried change,
Found that a friend's abode was pleasanter
Than relegation, penance and the rest.

Come, here's the last drop does its worst to wound:
Here's Guido poisoned to the bone, you say,

Your boasted still's full strain and strength : not so !
One master-squeeze from screw shall bring to birth
The hoard i' the heart o' the toad, hell's quintessence.
He learned the true convenience of the change,
And why a convent lacks the cheerful hearts
And helpful hands which female straits require,
When, in the blind mute villa by the gate,
Pompilia — what ? sang, danced, saw company ?
— Gave birth, Sir, to a child, his son and heir,
Or Guido's heir and Caponsacchi's son.
I want your word now : what do you say to this ?
What would say little Arezzo and great Rome,
And what did God say and the devil say
One at each ear o' the man, the husband, now
The father ? Why, the overburdened mind
Broke down, what was a brain became a blaze.
In fury of the moment — (that first news
Fell on the Count among his vines, it seems,
Doing his farm-work,) — why, he summoned steward,
Called in the first four hard hands and stout hearts
From field and furrow, poured forth his appeal,
Not to Rome's law and gospel any more,
But this clown with a mother or a wife,
That clodpole with a sister or a son :
And, whereas law and gospel held their peace,
What wonder if the sticks and stones cried out ?

All five soon somehow found themselves at Rome,
At the villa door : there was the warmth and light —
The sense of life so just an inch inside —
Some angel must have whispered " One more chance ! "

He gave it : bade the others stand aside :
Knocked at the door, — " Who is it knocks ? " cried one.

"I will make," surely Guido's angel urged,
"One final essay, last experiment,
Speak the word, name the name from out all names
Which, if, — as doubtless strong illusions are,
And strange disguisings whereby truth seems false,
And, since I am but man, I dare not do
God's work until assured I see with God, —
If I should bring my lips to breathe that name
And they be innocent, — nay, by one mere touch
Of innocence redeemed from utter guilt, —
That name will bar the door and bid fate pass.
I will not say 'It is a messenger,
A neighbor, even a belated man,
Much less your husband's friend, your husband's self:'
At such appeal the door is bound to ope.
But I will say" — here's rhetoric and to spare!
Why, Sir, the stumbling-block is cursed and kicked,
Block though it be; the name that brought offence
Will bring offence: the burnt child dreads the fire
Although that fire feed on some taper-wick
Which never left the altar nor singed a fly:
And had a harmless man tripped you by chance,
How would you wait him, stand or step aside,
When next you heard he rolled your way? Enough.

"Giuseppe Caponsacchi!" Guido cried;
And open flew the door: enough again.
Vengeance, you know, burst, like a mountain-wave
That holds a monster in it, over the house,
And wiped its filthy four walls free at last
With a wash of hell-fire, — father, mother, wife,
Killed them all, bathed his name clean in their blood,
And, reeking so, was caught, his friends and he,
Haled hither and imprisoned yesternight

O' the day all this was.
Now, Sir, tale is told,
Of how the old couple come to lie in state
Though hacked to pieces, — never, the expert say,
So thorough a study of stabbing — while the wife
(Viper-like, very difficult to slay)
Writhes still through every ring of her, poor wretch,
At the Hospital hard by — survives, we 'll hope,
To somewhat purify her putrid soul
By full confession, make so much amends
While time lasts ; since at day's end die she must.

For Caponsacchi, — why, they 'll have him here,
As hero of the adventure, who so fit
To figure in the coming Carnival ?
'T will make the fortune of whate'er saloon
Hears him recount, with helpful cheek, and eye
Hotly indignant now, now dewy-dimmed,
The incidents of flight, pursuit, surprise,
Capture, with hints of kisses all between —
While Guido, wholly unromantic spouse,
No longer fit to laugh at since the blood
Gave the broad farce an all too brutal air,
Why, he and those four luckless friends of his
May tumble in the straw this bitter day —
Laid by the heels i' the New Prison, I hear,
To bide their trial, since trial, and for the life,
Follows if but for form's sake : yes, indeed !

But with a certain issue : no dispute,
" Try him," bids law : formalities oblige :
But as to the issue, — look me in the face ! —
If the law thinks to find them guilty, Sir,
Master or men — touch one hair of the five,

Then I say in the name of all that 's left
Of honor in Rome, civility i' the world
Whereof Rome boasts herself the central source, —
There 's an end to all hope of justice more.
Astræa 's gone indeed, let hope go too!
Who is it dares impugn the natural law,
Deny God's word "the faithless wife shall die"?
What, are we blind? How can we fail to learn
This crowd of miseries make the man a mark,
Accumulate on one devoted head
For our example? — yours and mine who read
Its lesson thus — "Henceforward let none dare
Stand, like a natural in the public way,
Letting the very urchins twitch his beard
And tweak his nose, to earn a nickname so,
Be styled male-Grissel or else modern Job!"
Had Guido, in the twinkling of an eye,
Summed up the reckoning, promptly paid himself,
That morning when he came up with the pair
At the wayside inn, — exacted his just debt
By aid of what first mattock, pitchfork, axe
Came to hand in the helpful stable-yard,
And with that axe, if providence so pleased,
Cloven each head, by some Rolando-stroke,
In one clean cut from crown to clavicle,
— Slain the priest-gallant, the wife-paramour,
Sticking, for all defence, in each skull's cleft
The rhyme and reason of the stroke thus dealt,
To-wit, those letters and last evidence
Of shame, each package in its proper place, —
Bidding, who pitied, undistend the skulls, —
I say, the world had praised the man. But no!
That were too plain, too straight, too simply just!
He hesitates, calls law forsooth to help.

And law, distasteful to who calls in law
When honor is beforehand and would serve,
What wonder if law hesitate in turn,
Plead her disuse to calls o' the kind, reply
(Smiling a little) "'T is yourself assess
The worth of what 's lost, sum of damage done.
What you touched with so light a finger-tip,
You whose concern it was to grasp the thing,
Why must law gird herself and grapple with ?
Law, alien to the actor whose warm blood
Asks heat from law whose veins run lukewarm milk, —
What you dealt lightly with, shall law make out
Heinous forsooth ?"
Sir, what 's the good of law
In a case o' the kind ? None, as she all but says.
Call in law when a neighbor breaks your fence,
Cribs from your field, tampers with rent or lease,
Touches the purse or pocket, — but wooes your wife ?
No : take the old way trod when men were men !
Guido preferred the new path, — for his pains,
Stuck in a quagmire, floundered worse and worse
Until he managed somehow scramble back
Into the safe sure rutted road once more,
Revenged his own wrong like a gentleman.
Once back 'mid the familiar prints, no doubt
He made too rash amends for his first fault,
Vaulted too loftily over what barred him late,
And lit i' the mire again, — the common chance,
The natural over-energy : the deed
Maladroit yields three deaths instead of one,
And one life left : for where 's the Canon's corpse ?
All which is the worse for Guido, but, be frank —
The better for you and me and all the world,
Husbands of wives, especially in Rome.

The thing is put right, in the old place, — ay,
The rod hangs on its nail behind the door,
Fresh from the brine : a matter I commend
To the notice, during Carnival that 's near,
Of a certain what 's-his-name and jackanapes
Somewhat too civil of eves with lute and song
About a house here, where I keep a wife.
(You, being his cousin, may go tell him so.)

III.

THE OTHER HALF-ROME.

[That side of public opinion which is predisposed to take the weaker part and to look beneath the more obvious motives for the deeper-seated causes of any occurrence is given expression in Book III. The "Other Half-Rome," therefore, befriends the suffering wife and her untitled foster-parents, detects the inconsistencies of Guido's defence, and, in the interest of society at large, refuses to permit a husband to constitute himself judge and executioner in his own case.]

Another day that finds her living yet,
Little Pompilia, with the patient brow
And lamentable smile on those poor lips,
And, under the white hospital-array,
A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise
You'd think, yet now, stabbed through and through again,
Alive i' the ruins. 'T is a miracle.
It seems that, when her husband struck her first,
She prayed Madonna just that she might live
So long as to confess and be absolved;
And whether it was that, all her sad life long
Never before successful in a prayer,
This prayer rose with authority too dread, —
Or whether, because earth was hell to her,
By compensation, when the blackness broke

She got one glimpse of quiet and the cool blue,
To show her for a moment such things were, —
Or else, — as the Augustinian Brother thinks,
The friar who took confession from her lip, —
When a probationary soul that moved
From nobleness to nobleness, as she,
Over the rough way of the world, succumbs,
Bloodies its last thorn with unflinching foot,
The angels love to do their work betimes,
Staunch some wounds here nor leave so much for God.
Who knows? However it be, confessed, absolved,
She lies, with overplus of life beside
To speak and right herself from first to last,
Right the friend also, lamb-pure, lion-brave,
Care for the boy's concerns, to save the son
From the sire, her two-weeks' infant orphaned thus,
And — with best smile of all reserved for him —
Pardon that sire and husband from the heart.
A miracle, so tell your Molinists!

There she lies in the long white lazar-house.
Rome has besieged, these two days, never doubt,
Saint Anna's where she waits her death, to hear
Though but the chink o' the bell, turn o' the hinge
When the reluctant wicket opes at last,
Lets in, on now this and now that pretence,
Too many by half, — complain the men of art, —
For a patient in such plight. The lawyers first
Paid the due visit — justice must be done;
They took her witness, why the murder was.
Then the priests followed properly, — a soul
To shrive; 't was Brother Celestine's own right,
The same who noises thus her gifts abroad.
But many more, who found they were old friends,

Pushed in to have their stare and take their talk
And go forth boasting of it and to boast.
Old Monna Baldi chatters like a jay,
Swears — but that, prematurely trundled out
Just as she felt the benefit begin,
The miracle was snapped up by somebody, —
Her palsied limb 'gan prick and promise life
At touch o' the bedclothes merely, — how much more
Had she but brushed the body as she tried!
Cavalier Carlo — well, there 's some excuse
For him — Maratta who paints Virgins so —
He too must fee the porter and slip by
With pencil cut and paper squared, and straight
There was he figuring away at face:
"A lovelier face is not in Rome," cried he,
"Shaped like a peacock's egg, the pure as pearl,
That hatches you anon a snow-white chick."
Then, oh that pair of eyes, that pendent hair,
Black this and black the other! Mighty fine —
But nobody cared ask to paint the same,
Nor grew a poet over hair and eyes
Four little years ago when, ask and have,
The woman who wakes all this rapture leaned
Flower-like from out her window long enough,
As much uncomplimented as uncropped
By comers and goers in Via Vittoria: eh?
'T is just a flower's fate: past parterre we trip,
Till peradventure someone plucks our sleeve —
"Yon blossom at the briar's end, that 's the rose
Two jealous people fought for yesterday
And killed each other: see, there 's undisturbed
A pretty pool at the root, of rival red!"
Then cry we "Ah, the perfect paragon!"
Then crave we "Just one keepsake-leaf for us!"

Truth lies between : there 's anyhow a child
Of seventeen years, whether a flower or weed,
Ruined : who did it shall account to Christ —
Having no pity on the harmless life
And gentle face and girlish form he found,
And thus flings back. Go practise if you please
With men and women : leave a child alone
For Christ's particular love's sake ! — so I say.

Somebody, at the bedside, said much more,
Took on him to explain the secret cause
O' the crime : quoth he, "Such crimes are very rife,
Explode nor make us wonder now-a-days,
Seeing that Antichrist disseminates
That doctrine of the Philosophic Sin :
Molinos' sect will soon make earth too hot ! "
"Nay," groaned the Augustinian, "what 's there new ?
Crime will not fail to flare up from men's hearts
While hearts are men's and so born criminal ;
Which one fact, always old yet ever new,
Accounts for so much crime that, for my part,
Molinos may go whistle to the wind
That waits outside a certain church, you know ! "

Though really it does seem as if she here,
Pompilia, living so and dying thus,
Has had undue experience how much crime
A heart can hatch. Why was she made to learn
— Not you, not I, not even Molinos' self —
What Guido Franceschini's heart could hold ?
Thus saintship is effected probably ;
No sparing saints the process ! — which the more
Tends to the reconciling us, no saints,
To sinnership, immunity and all.

For see now : Pietro and Violante's life
Till seventeen years ago, all Rome might note
And quote for happy — see the signs distinct
Of happiness as we yon Triton's trump.
What could they be but happy ? — balanced so,
Nor low i' the social scale nor yet too high,
Nor poor nor richer than comports with ease,
Nor bright and envied, nor obscure and scorned,
Nor so young that their pleasures fell too thick,
Nor old past catching pleasure when it fell,
Nothing above, below the just degree,
All at the mean where joy's components mix.
So again, in the couple's very souls
You saw the adequate half with half to match,
Each having and each lacking somewhat, both
Making a whole that had all and lacked naught.
The round and sound, in whose composure just
The acquiescent and recipient side
Was Pietro's, and the stirring striving one
Violante's : both in union gave the due
Quietude, enterprise, craving and content,
Which go to bodily health and peace of mind.
But, as 't is said a body, rightly mixed,
Each element in equipoise, would last
Too long and live for ever, — accordingly
Holds a germ—sand-grain weight too much i' the scale—
Ordained to get predominance one day
And so bring all to ruin and release, —
Not otherwise a fatal germ lurked here :
" With mortals much must go, but something stays ;
Nothing will stay of our so happy selves."
Out of the very ripeness of life's core
A worm was bred — " Our life shall leave no fruit."
Enough of bliss, they thought, could bliss bear seed,

Yield its like, propagate a bliss in turn
And keep the kind up ; not supplant themselves
But put in evidence, record they were,
Show them, when done with, i' the shape of a child.
" 'T is in a child, man and wife grow complete,
One flesh : God says so : let him do his work ! "

Now, one reminder of this gnawing want,
One special prick o' the maggot at the core,
Always befell when, as the day came round,
A certain yearly sum, — our Pietro being,
As the long name runs, an usufructuary, —
Dropped in the common bag as interest
Of money, his till death, not afterward,
Failing an heir : an heir would take and take,
A child of theirs be wealthy in their place
To nobody's hurt — the stranger else seized all.
Prosperity rolled river-like and stopped,
Making their mill go ; but when wheel wore out,
The wave would find a space and sweep on free
And, half-a-mile off, grind some neighbor's corn.

Adam-like, Pietro sighed and said no more :
Eve saw the apple was fair and good to taste,
So, plucked it, having asked the snake advice.
She told her husband God was merciful,
And his and her prayer granted at the last :
Let the old mill-stone moulder, — wheel unworn,
Quartz from the quarry, shot into the stream
Adroitly, as before should go bring grist —
Their house continued to them by an heir,
Their vacant heart replenished with a child.
We have her own confession at full length
Made in the first remorse : 't was Jubilee

Pealed in the ear o' the conscience and it woke.
She found she had offended God no doubt,
So much was plain from what had happened since,
Misfortune on misfortune ; but she harmed
No one i' the world, so far as she could see.
The act had gladdened Pietro to the height,
Her spouse whom God himself must gladden so
Or not at all: thus much seems probable
From the implicit faith, or rather say
Stupid credulity of the foolish man
Who swallowed such a tale nor strained a whit
Even at his wife's far-over-fifty years
Matching his sixty-and-under. Him she blessed;
And as for doing any detriment
To the veritable heir, — why, tell her first
Who was he? Which of all the hands held up
I' the crowd, one day would gather round their gate,
Did she so wrong by intercepting thus
The ducat, spendthrift fortune thought to fling
For a scramble just to make the mob break shins?
She kept it, saved them kicks and cuffs thereby.
While at the least one good work had she wrought,
Good, clearly and incontestably! Her cheat —
What was it to its subject, the child's self,
But charity and religion? See the girl!
A body most like — a soul too probably —
Doomed to death, such a double death as waits
The illicit offspring of a common trull,
Sure to resent and forthwith rid herself
Of a mere interruption to sin's trade,
In the efficacious way old Tiber knows.
Was not so much proved by the ready sale
O' the child, glad transfer of this irksome chance?
Well then, she had caught up this castaway :

This fragile egg, some careless wild bird dropped,
She had picked from where it waited the foot-fall,
And put in her own breast till forth broke finch
Able to sing God praise on mornings now.
What so excessive harm was done ? — she asked.

To which demand the dreadful answer comes —
For that same deed, now at Lorenzo's church,
Both agents, conscious and inconscious, lie ;
While she, the deed was done to benefit,
Lies also, the most lamentable of things,
Yonder where curious people count her breaths,
Calculate how long yet the little life
Unspilt may serve their turn nor spoil the show,
Give them their story, then the church its group.

Well, having gained Pompilia, the girl grew
I' the midst of Pietro here, Violante there,
Each, like a semicircle with stretched arms,
Joining the other round her preciousness —
Two walls that go about a garden-plot
Where a chance sliver, branchlet slipt from bole
Of some tongue-leaved eye-figured Eden tree,
Filched by two exiles and borne far away,
Patiently glorifies their solitude, —
Year by year mounting, grade by grade surmount
The builded brick-work, yet is compassed still,
Still hidden happily and shielded safe, —
Else why should miracle have graced the ground ?
But on the twelfth sun that brought April there
What meant that laugh ? The coping-stone was reached;
Nay, above towered a light tuft of bloom
To be toyed with by butterfly or bee,
Done good to or else harm to from outside :

Pompilia's root, stalk and a branch or two
Home enclosed still, the rest would be the world's.
All which was taught our couple though obtuse,
Since walls have ears, when one day brought a priest,
Smooth-mannered soft-speeched sleek-cheeked visitor,
The notable Abate Paolo — known
As younger brother of a Tuscan house
Whereof the actual representative,
Count Guido, had employed his youth and age
In culture of Rome's most productive plant —
A cardinal: but years pass and change comes,
In token of which, here was our Paolo brought
To broach a weighty business. Might he speak?
Yes — to Violante somehow caught alone
While Pietro took his after-dinner doze,
And the young maiden, busily as befits,
Minded her broider-frame three chambers off.

So — giving now his great flap-hat a gloss
With flat o' the hand between-whiles, soothing now
The silk from out its creases o'er the calf,
Setting the stocking clerical again,
But never disengaging, once engaged,
The thin clear grey hold of his eyes on her —
He dissertated on that Tuscan house,
Those Franceschini, — very old they were —
Not rich however — oh, not rich, at least,
As people look to be who, low i' the scale
One way, have reason, rising all they can
By favor of the money-bag! 't is fair —
Do all gifts go together? But don't suppose
That being not so rich means all so poor!
Say rather, well enough — i' the way, indeed,
Ha, ha, to fortune better than the best:

Since if his brother's patron-friend kept faith,
Put into promised play the Cardinalate,
Their house might wear the red cloth that keeps warm,
Would but the Count have patience — there 's the point!
For he was slipping into years apace,
And years make men restless — they needs must spy
Some certainty, some sort of end assured,
Some sparkle, tho' from topmost beacon-tip,
That warrants life a harbor through the haze.
In short, call him fantastic as you choose,
Guido was home-sick, yearned for the old sights
And usual faces, — fain would settle himself
And have the patron's bounty when it fell
Irrigate far rather than deluge near,
Go fertilize Arezzo, not flood Rome.
Sooth to say, 't was the wiser wish : the Count
Proved wanting in ambition, — let us avouch,
Since truth is best, — in callousness of heart,
And winced at pin-pricks whereby honors hang
A ribbon o'er each puncture : his — no soul
Ecclesiastic (here the hat was brushed)
Humble but self-sustaining, calm and cold,
Having, as one who puts his hand to the plough,
Renounced the over-vivid family-feel —
Poor brother Guido ! All too plain, he pined
Amid Rome's pomp and glare for dinginess
And that dilapidated palace-shell
Vast as a quarry and, very like, as bare —
Since to this comes old grandeur now-a-days —
Or that absurd wild villa in the waste
O' the hill side, breezy though, for who likes air,
Vittiano, nor unpleasant with its vines,
Outside the city and the summer heats.
And now his harping on this one tense chord

The villa and the palace, palace this
And villa the other, all day and all night
Creaked like the implacable cicala's cry
And made one's ear drum ache: naught else would serve
But that, to light his mother's visage up
With second youth, hope, gaiety again,
He must find straightway, woo and haply win
And bear away triumphant back, some wife.
Well now, the man was rational in his way:
He, the Abate, — ought he to interpose?
Unless by straining still his tutelage
(Priesthood leaps over elder-brothership)
Across this difficulty: then let go,
Leave the poor fellow in peace! Would that be wrong?
There was no making Guido great, it seems,
Spite of himself: then happy be his dole!
Indeed, the Abate's little interest
Was somewhat nearly touched i' the case, they saw:
Since if his simple kinsman so were bent,
Began his rounds in Rome to catch a wife,
Full soon would such unworldliness surprise
The rare bird, sprinkle salt on phœnix' tail,
And so secure the nest a sparrow-hawk.
No lack of mothers here in Rome, — no dread
Of daughters lured as larks by looking-glass!
The first name-pecking credit-scratching fowl
Would drop her unfledged cuckoo in our nest
To gather greyness there, give voice at length
And shame the brood . . . but it was long ago
When crusades were, and we sent eagles forth!
No, that at least the Abate could forestall.
He read the thought within his brother's word,
Knew what he purposed better than himself.

We want no name and fame — having our own :
No worldly aggrandizement — such we fly :
But if some wonder of a woman's-heart
Were yet untainted on this grimy earth,
Tender and true — tradition tells of such —
Prepared to pant in time and tune with ours —
If some good girl (a girl, since she must take
The new bent, live new life, adopt new modes)
Not wealthy (Guido for his rank was poor)
But with whatever dowry came to hand, —
There were the lady-love predestinate!
And somehow the Abate's guardian eye —
Scintillant, rutilant, fraternal fire, —
Roving round everyway had seized the prize
— The instinct of us, we, the spiritualty!
Come, cards on table; was it true or false
That here — here in this very tenement —
Yea, Via Vittoria did a marvel hide,
Lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf
Guessed thro' the sheath that saved it from the sun?
A daughter with the mother's hands still clasped
Over her head for fillet virginal,
A wife worth Guido's house and hand and heart?
He came to see; had spoken, he could no less —
(A final cherish of the stockinged calf)
If harm were, — well, the matter was off his mind.

Then with the great air did he kiss, devout,
Violante's hand, and rise up his whole height
(A certain purple gleam about the black)
And go forth grandly, — as if the Pope came next.
And so Violante rubbed her eyes awhile,
Got up too, walked to wake her Pietro soon
And pour into his ear the mighty news

How somebody had somehow somewhere seen
Their tree-top-tuft of bloom upon the wall,
And came now to apprise them the tree's self
Was no such crab-sort as should go feed swine,
But veritable gold, the Hesperian ball
Ordained for Hercules to haste and pluck,
And bear and give the Gods to banquet with —
Hercules standing ready at the door.
Whereon did Pietro rub his eyes in turn,
Look very wise, a little woeful too,
Then, periwig on head, and cane in hand,
Sally forth dignifiedly into the Square
Of Spain across Babbuino the six steps,
Toward the Boat-fountain where our idlers lounge, —
Ask, for form's sake, who Hercules might be,
And have congratulation from the world.

Heartily laughed the world in his fool's-face
And told him Hercules was just the heir
To the stubble once a corn-field, and brick-heap
Where used to be a dwelling-place now burned.
Guido and Franceschini ; a Count, — ay :
But a cross i' the poke to bless the Countship ? No !
All gone except sloth, pride, rapacity,
Humors of the imposthume incident
To rich blood that runs thin, — nursed to a head
By the rankly-salted soil — a cardinal's court
Where, parasite and picker-up of crumbs,
He had hung on long, and now, let go, said some,
Shaken off, said others, — but in any case
Tired of the trade and something worse for wear,
Was wanting to change town for country quick,
Go home again : let Pietro help him home !
The brother, Abate Paolo, shrewder mouse,

Had pricked for comfortable quarters, inched
Into the core of Rome, and fattened so;
But Guido, over-burly for rat's hole
Suited to clerical slimness, starved outside,
Must shift for himself: and so the shift was this!
What, was the snug retreat of Pietro tracked,
The little provision for his old age snuffed?
"Oh, make your girl a lady, an you list,
But have more mercy on our wit than vaunt
Your bargain as we burgesses who brag!
Why, Goodman Dullard, if a friend must speak,
Would the Count, think you, stoop to you and yours
Were there the value of one penny-piece
To rattle 'twixt his palms — or likelier laugh,
Bid your Pompilia help you black his shoe?"

Home again, shaking off the puzzled pate,
Went Pietro to announce a change indeed,
Yet point Violante where some solace lay
Of a rueful sort, — the taper, quenched so soon,
Had ended merely in a snuff, not stink —
Congratulate there was one hope the less
Not misery the more: and so an end.

The marriage thus impossible, the rest
Followed: our spokesman, Paolo, heard his fate,
Resignedly Count Guido bore the blow:
Violante wiped away the transient tear,
Renounced the playing Danae to gold dreams,
Praised much her Pietro's prompt sagaciousness,
Found neighbors' envy natural, lightly laughed
At gossips' malice, fairly wrapped herself
In her integrity three folds about,
And, letting pass a little day or two,
Threw, even over that integrity,

Another wrappage, namely one thick veil
That hid her, matron-wise, from head to foot,
And, by the hand holding a girl veiled too,
Stood, one dim end of a December day,
In Saint Lorenzo on the altar-step —
Just where she lies now and that girl will lie —
Only with fifty candles' company
Now, in the place of the poor winking one
Which saw, — doors shut and sacristan made sure, —
A priest — perhaps Abate Paolo — wed
Guido clandestinely, irrevocably
To his Pompilia aged thirteen years
And five months, — witness the church register, —
Pompilia, (thus become Count Guido's wife
Clandestinely, irrevocably his,)
Who all the while had borne, from first to last,
As brisk a part i' the bargain, as yon lamb,
Brought forth from basket and set out for sale,
Bears while they chaffer, wary market-man
And voluble housewife, o'er it, — each in turn
Patting the curly calm inconscious head,
With the shambles ready round the corner there,
When the talk 's talked out and a bargain struck.

Transfer complete, why, Pietro was apprised.
Violante sobbed the sobs and prayed the prayers
And said the serpent tempted so she fell,
Till Pietro had to clear his brow apace
And make the best of matters: wrath at first, —
How else? pacification presently,
Why not? — could flesh withstand the impurpled one,
The very Cardinal, Paolo's patron-friend?
Who, justifiably surnamed "a hinge,"
Knew where the mollifying oil should drop

To cure the creak o' the valve, — considerate
For frailty, patient in a naughty world.
He even volunteered to supervise
The rough draught of those marriage-articles
Signed in a hurry by Pietro, since revoked:
Trust 's politic, suspicion does the harm,
There is but one way to brow-beat this world,
Dumb-founder doubt, and repay scorn in kind, —
To go on trusting, namely, till faith move
Mountains.

And faith here made the mountains move.
Why, friends whose zeal cried "Caution ere too late!"—
Bade "Pause ere jump, with both feet joined, on slough!" —
Counselled "If rashness then, now temperance!" —
Heard for their pains that Pietro had closed eyes,
Jumped and was in the middle of the mire,
Money and all, just what should sink a man.
By the mere marriage, Guido gained forthwith
Dowry, his wife's right; no rescinding there:
But Pietro, why must he needs ratify
One gift Violante gave, pay down one doit
Promised in first fool's-flurry? Grasp the bag
Lest the son's service flag, — is reason and rhyme,
Above all when the son 's a son-in-law.
Words to the wind! The parents cast their lot
Into the lap o' the daughter: and the son
Now with a right to lie there, took what fell,
Pietro's whole having and holding, house and field,
Goods, chattels and effects, his worldly worth
Present and in perspective, all renounced
In favor of Guido. As for the usufruct —

The interest now, the principal anon,
Would Guido please to wait, at Pietro's death:
Till when, he must support the couple's charge,
Bear with them, housemates, pensionaries, pawned
To an alien for fulfilment of their pact.
Guido should at discretion deal them orts,
Bread-bounty in Arezzo the strange place, —
They who had lived deliciously and rolled
Rome's choicest comfit 'neath the tongue before.
Into this quag, "jump" bade the Cardinal!
And neck-deep in a minute there flounced they.

But they touched bottom at Arezzo: there —
Four months' experience of how craft and greed
Quickened by penury and pretentious hate
Of plain truth, brutify and bestialize, —
Four months' taste of apportioned insolence,
Cruelty graduated, dose by dose
Of ruffianism dealt out at bed and board,
And lo, the work was done, success clapped hands.
The starved, stripped, beaten brace of stupid dupes
Broke at last in their desperation loose,
Fled away for their lives, and lucky so;
Found their account in casting coat afar
And bearing off a shred of skin at least:
Left Guido lord o' the prey, as the lion is,
And, careless what came after, carried their wrongs
To Rome, — I nothing doubt, with such remorse
As folly feels, since pain can make it wise,
But crime, past wisdom, which is innocence,
Needs not be plagued with till a later day.

Pietro went back to beg from door to door,
In hope that memory not quite extinct

Of cheery days and festive nights would move
Friends and acquaintance — after the natural laugh,
And tributary "Just as we foretold — "
To show some bowels, give the dregs o' the cup,
Scraps of the trencher, to their host that was,
Or let him share the mat with the mastiff, he
Who lived large and kept open house so long.
Not so Violante: ever a-head i' the march,
Quick at the bye-road and the cut-across,
She went first to the best adviser, God —
Whose finger unmistakably was felt
In all this retribution of the past.
Here was the prize of sin, luck of a lie!
But here too was what Holy Year would help,
Bound to rid sinners of sin vulgar, sin
Abnormal, sin prodigious, up to sin
Impossible and supposed for Jubilee' sake:
To lift the leadenest of lies, let soar
The soul unhampered by a feather-weight.
"I will" said she "go burn out this bad hole
That breeds the scorpion, baulk the plague at least
Of hope to further plague by progeny:
I will confess my fault, be punished, yes,
But pardoned too: Saint Peter pays for all."

So, with the crowd she mixed, made for the dome,
Through the great door new-broken for the nonce
Marched, muffled more than ever matron-wise,
Up the left nave to the formidable throne,
Fell into file with this the poisoner
And that the parricide, and reached in turn
The poor repugnant Penitentiary
Set at this gully-hole o' the world's discharge
To help the frightfullest of filth have vent,

And then knelt down and whispered in his ear
How she had bought Pompilia, palmed the babe
On Pietro, passed the girl off as their child
To Guido, and defrauded of his due
This one and that one, — more than she could name,
Until her solid piece of wickedness
Happened to split and spread woe far and wide:
Contritely now she brought the case for cure.

Replied the throne — "Ere God forgive the guilt,
Make man some restitution! Do your part!
The owners of your husband's heritage,
Barred thence by this pretended birth and heir, —
Tell them, the bar came so, is broken so,
Theirs be the due reversion as before!
Your husband who, no partner in the guilt,
Suffers the penalty, led blindfold thus
By love of what he thought his flesh and blood
To alienate his all in her behalf, —
Tell him too such contract is null and void!
Last, he who personates your son-in-law,
Who with sealed eyes and stopped ears, tame and mute,
Took at your hand that bastard of a whore
You called your daughter and he calls his wife, —
Tell him, and bear the anger which is just!
Then, penance so performed, may pardon be!"

Who could gainsay this just and right award?
Nobody in the world: but, out o' the world,
Who knows? — might timid intervention be
From any makeshift of an angel-guide,
Substitute for celestial guardianship,
Pretending to take care of the girl's self:
"Woman, confessing crime is healthy work,
And telling truth relieves a liar like you,

But how of my quite unconsidered charge?
No thought if, while this good befalls yourself,
Aught in the way of harm may find out her?"
No least thought, I assure you: truth being truth,
Tell it and shame the devil!
Said and done:
Home went Violante, disbosomed all:
And Pietro who, six months before, had borne
Word after word of such a piece of news
Like so much cold steel inched through his breast-blade,
Now at its entry gave a leap for joy,
As who — what did I say of one in a quag? —
Should catch a hand from heaven and spring thereby
Out of the mud, on ten toes stand once more.
"What? All that used to be, may be again?
My money mine again, my house, my land,
My chairs and tables, all mine evermore?
What, the girl's dowry never was the girl's,
And, unpaid yet, is never now to pay?
Then the girl's self, my pale Pompilia child
That used to be my own with her great eyes —
He who drove us forth, why should he keep her
When proved as very a pauper as himself?
Will she come back, with nothing changed at all,
And laugh 'But how you dreamed uneasily!
I saw the great drops stand here on your brow —
Did I do wrong to wake you with a kiss?'
No, indeed, darling! No, for wide awake
I see another outburst of surprise:
The lout-lord, bully-beggar, braggart-sneak,
Who not content with cutting purse, crops ear —
Assuredly it shall be salve to mine
When this great news red-letters him, the rogue!
Ay, let him taste the teeth o' the trap, this fox,

Give us our lamb back, golden fleece and all,
Let her creep in and warm our breasts again!
Why care for the past? We three are our old selves,
And know now what the outside world is worth."
And so, he carried case before the courts;
And there Violante, blushing to the bone,
Made public declaration of her fault,
Renounced her motherhood, and prayed the law
To interpose, frustrate of its effect
Her folly, and redress the injury done.

Whereof was the disastrous consequence,
That though indisputably clear the case
(For thirteen years are not so large a lapse,
And still six witnesses survived in Rome
To prove the truth o' the tale) — yet, patent wrong
Seemed Guido's; the first cheat had chanced on him:
Here was the pity that, deciding right,
Those who began the wrong would gain the prize.
Guido pronounced the story one long lie
Lied to do robbery and take revenge:
Or say it were no lie at all but truth,
Then, it both robbed the right heirs and shamed him
Without revenge to humanize the deed:
What had he done when first they shamed him thus?
But that were too fantastic: losels they,
And leasing this world's-wonder of a lie,
They lied to blot him though it brand themselves.

So answered Guido through the Abate's mouth.
Wherefore the court, its customary way,
Inclined to the middle course the sage affect.
They held the child to be a changeling, — good:
But, lest the husband got no good thereby,
They willed the dowry, though not hers at all,

Should yet be his, if not by right then grace —
Part-payment for the plain injustice done.
As for that other contract, Pietro's work,
Renunciation of his own estate,
That must be cancelled — give him back his gifts,
He was no party to the cheat at least!
So ran the judgment: — whence a prompt appeal
On both sides, seeing right is absolute.
Cried Pietro "Is the child no child of mine?
Why give her a child's dowry?" — "Have I right
To the dowry, why not to the rest as well?"
Cried Guido, or cried Paolo in his name:
Till law said "Reinvestigate the case!"
And so the matter pends, to this same day.

Hence new disaster — here no outlet seemed;
Whatever the fortune of the battle-field,
No path whereby the fatal man might march
Victorious, wreath on head and spoils in hand,
And back turned full upon the baffled foe, —
Nor cranny whence, desperate and disgraced,
Stripped to the skin, he might be fain to crawl
Worm-like, and so away with his defeat
To other fortune and a novel prey.
No, he was pinned to the place there, left alone
With his immense hate and, the solitary
Subject to satisfy that hate, his wife.
"Cast her off? Turn her naked out of doors?
Easily said! But still the action pends,
Still dowry, principal and interest,
Pietro's possessions, all I bargained for, —
Any good day, be but my friends alert,
May give them me if she continue mine.
Yet, keep her? Keep the puppet of my foes —

Her voice that lisps me back their curse — her eye
They lend their leer of triumph to — her lip
I touch and taste their very filth upon?"

In short, he also took the middle course
Rome taught him — did at last excogitate
How he might keep the good and leave the bad
Twined in revenge, yet extricable, — nay
Make the very hate's eruption, very rush
Of the unpent sluice of cruelty relieve
His heart first, then go fertilize his field.
What if the girl-wife, tortured with due care,
Should take, as though spontaneously, the road
It were impolitic to thrust her on?
If, goaded, she broke out in full revolt,
Followed her parents i' the face o' the world,
Branded as runaway not castaway,
Self-sentenced and self-punished in the act?
So should the loathed form and detested face
Launch themselves into hell and there be lost
While he looked o'er the brink with folded arms;
So should the heaped-up shames go shuddering back
O' the head o' the heapers, Pietro and his wife,
And bury in the breakage three at once:
While Guido, left free, no one right renounced,
Gain present, gain prospective, all the gain,
None of the wife except her rights absorbed,
Should ask law what it was law paused about —
If law were dubious still whose word to take,
The husband's — dignified and derelict,
Or the wife's — the . . . what I tell you. It should be.

Guido's first step was to take pen, indite
A letter to the Abate, — not his own,

His wife's, — she should re-write, sign, seal and send.
She liberally told the household-news,
Rejoiced her vile progenitors were gone,
Revealed their malice — how they even laid
A last injunction on her, when they fled,
That she should forthwith find a paramour,
Complot with him to gather spoil enough,
Then burn the house down, — taking previous care
To poison all its inmates overnight, —
And so companioned, so provisioned too,
Follow to Rome and there join fortunes gay.
This letter, traced in pencil-characters,
Guido as easily got re-traced in ink
By his wife's pen, guided from end to end,
As if it had been just so much Chinese.
For why? That wife could broider, sing perhaps,
Pray certainly, but no more read than write
This letter "which yet write she must," he said,
"Being half courtesy and compliment,
Half sisterliness: take the thing on trust!"
She had as readily re-traced the words
Of her own death-warrant, — in some sort 't was so.
This letter the Abate in due course
Communicated to such curious souls
In Rome as needs must pry into the cause
Of quarrel, why the Comparini fled
The Franceschini, whence the grievance grew,
What the hubbub meant: "Nay, — see the wife's own word,
Authentic answer! Tell detractors too
There 's a plan formed, a programme figured here
— Pray God no after-practice put to proof,
This letter cast no light upon, one day!"

So much for what should work in Rome: back now
To Arezzo, follow up the project there,
Forward the next step with as bold a foot,
And plague Pompilia to the height, you see!
Accordingly did Guido set himself
To worry up and down, across, around,
The woman, hemmed in by her household-bars, —
Chase her about the coop of daily life,
Having first stopped each outlet thence save one
Which, like bird with a ferret in her haunt,
She needs must seize as sole way of escape
Though there was tied and twittering a decoy
To seem as if it tempted, — just the plume
O' the popinjay, not a real respite there
From tooth and claw of something in the dark, —
Giuseppe Caponsacchi.
Now begins
The tenebrific passage of the tale:
How hold a light, display the cavern's gorge?
How, in this phase of the affair, show truth?
Here is the dying wife who smiles and says
"So it was, — so it was not, — how it was,
I never knew nor ever care to know — "
Till they all weep, physician, man of law,
Even that poor old bit of battered brass
Beaten out of all shape by the world's sins,
Common utensil of the lazar-house —
Confessor Celestino groans "'T is truth,
All truth and only truth: there's something here,
Some presence in the room beside us all,
Something that every lie expires before:
No question she was pure from first to last."
So far is well and helps us to believe:
But beyond, she the helpless, simple-sweet

Or silly-sooth, unskilled to break one blow
At her good fame by putting finger forth, —
How can she render service to the truth?
The bird says "So I fluttered where a springe
Caught me: the springe did not contrive itself,
That I know: who contrived it, God forgive!"
But we, who hear no voice and have dry eyes,
Must ask, — we cannot else, absolving her, —
How of the part played by that same decoy
I' the catching, caging? Was himself caught first?
We deal here with no innocent at least,
No witless victim, — he's a man of the age
And priest beside, — persuade the mocking world
Mere charity boiled over in this sort!
He whose own safety too, — (the Pope 's apprised —
Good-natured with the secular offence,
The Pope looks grave on priesthood in a scrape)
Our priest's own safety therefore, may-be life,
Hangs on the issue! You will find it hard.
Guido is here to meet you with fixed foot,
Stiff like a statue — "Leave what went before!
My wife fled i' the company of a priest,
Spent two days and two nights alone with him:
Leave what came after!" He stands hard to throw.
Moreover priests are merely flesh and blood;
When we get weakness, and no guilt beside,
'T is no such great ill-fortune: finding gray,
We gladly call that white which might be black,
Too used to the double-dye. So, if the priest,
Moved by Pompilia's youth and beauty, gave
Way to the natural weakness. . . . Anyhow
Here be facts, charactery; what they spell
Determine, and thence pick what sense you may!
There was a certain young bold handsome priest

Popular in the city, far and wide
Famed, since Arezzo 's but a little place,
As the best of good companions, gay and grave
At the decent minute; settled in his stall,
Or sidling, lute on lap, by lady's couch,
Ever the courtly Canon; see in him
A proper star to climb and culminate,
Have its due handbreadth of the heaven at Rome,
Though meanwhile pausing on Arezzo's edge,
As modest candle does 'mid mountain fog,
To rub off redness and rusticity
Ere it sweep chastened, gain the silver-sphere!
Whether through Guido's absence or what else,
This Caponsacchi, favorite of the town,
Was yet no friend of his nor free o' the house,
Though both moved in the regular magnates' march:
Each must observe the other's tread and halt
At church, saloon, theatre, house of play.
Who could help noticing the husband's slouch,
The black of his brow — or miss the news that buzzed
Of how the little solitary wife
Wept and looked out of window all day long?
What need of minute search into such springs
As start men, set o' the move? — machinery
Old as earth, obvious as the noonday sun.
Why, take men as they come, — an instance now, —
Of all those who have simply gone to see
Pompilia on her deathbed since four days,
Half at the least are, call it how you please,
In love with her — I don't except the priests
Nor even the old confessor whose eyes run
Over at what he styles his sister's voice
Who died so early and weaned him from the world.
Well, had they viewed her ere the paleness pushed

The last o' the red o' the rose away, while yet
Some hand, adventurous 'twixt the wind and her,
Might let shy life run back and raise the flower
Rich with reward up to the guardian's face, —
Would they have kept that hand employed all day
At fumbling on with prayer-book pages? No!
Men are men: why then need I say one word
More than that our mere man the Canon here
Saw, pitied, loved Pompilia?

This is why;
This startling why: that Caponsacchi's self —
Whom foes and friends alike avouch, for good
Or ill, a man of truth whate'er betide,
Intrepid altogether, reckless too
How his own fame and fortune, tossed to the winds,
Suffer by any turn the adventure take,
Nay, more — not thrusting, like a badge to hide,
'Twixt shirt and skin a joy which shown is shame —
But flirting flag-like i' the face o' the world
This tell-tale kerchief, this conspicuous love
For the lady, — oh, called innocent love, I know!
Only, such scarlet fiery innocence
As most folk would try muffle up in shade, —
'T is strange then that this else abashless mouth
Should yet maintain, for truth's sake which is God's,
That it was not he made the first advance,
That, even ere word had passed between the two,
Pompilia penned him letters, passionate prayers,
If not love, then so simulating love
That he, no novice to the taste of thyme,
Turned from such over-luscious honey-clot
At end o' the flower, and would not lend his lip
Till . . . but the tale here frankly outsoars faith:

There must be falsehood somewhere. For her part,
Pompilia quietly constantly avers
She never penned a letter in her life
Nor to the Canon nor any other man,
Being incompetent to write and read:
Nor had she ever uttered word to him, nor he
To her till that same evening when they met,
She on her window-terrace, he beneath
I' the public street, as was their fateful chance,
And she adjured him in the name of God
To find out, bring to pass where, when and how
Escape with him to Rome might be contrived.
Means were found, plan laid, time fixed, she avers,
And heart assured to heart in loyalty,
All at an impulse! All extemporized
As in romance-books! Is that credible?
Well, yes: as she avers this with calm mouth
Dying, I do think "Credible!" you'd cry —
Did not the priest's voice come to break the spell.
They questioned him apart, as the custom is,
When first the matter made a noise at Rome,
And he, calm, constant then as she is now,
For truth's sake did assert and re-assert
Those letters called him to her and he came,
— Which damns the story credible otherwise.
Why should this man, — mad to devote himself,
Careless what comes of his own fame, the first, —
Be studious thus to publish and declare
Just what the lightest nature loves to hide,
So screening lady from the byword's laugh
"First spoke the lady, last the cavalier!"
— I say, — why should the man tell truth just now
When graceful lying meets such ready shrift?
Or is there a first moment for a priest

As for a woman, when invaded shame
Must have its first and last excuse to show?
Do both contrive love's entry in the mind
Shall look, i' the manner of it, a surprise, —
That after, once the flag o' the fort hauled down,
Effrontery may sink drawbridge, open gate,
Welcome and entertain the conqueror?
Or what do you say to a touch of the devil's worst?
Can it be that the husband, he who wrote
The letter to his brother I told you of,
I' the name of her it meant to criminate, —
What if he wrote those letters to the priest?
Further the priest says, when it first befell,
This folly o' the letters, that he checked the flow,
Put them back lightly each with its reply.
Here again vexes new discrepancy:
There never reached her eye a word from him:
He did write but she could not read — could just
Burn the offence to wifehood, womanhood,
So did burn: never bade him come to her,
Yet when it proved he must come, let him come,
And when he did come though uncalled, — why, spoke
Prompt by an inspiration: thus it chanced.
Will you go somewhat back to understand?

When first, pursuant to his plan, there sprang,
Like an uncaged beast, Guido's cruelty
On soul and body of his wife, she cried
To those whom law appoints resource for such,
The secular guardian, — that 's the Governor,
And the Archbishop, — that 's the spiritual guide,
And prayed them take the claws from out her flesh.
Now, this is ever the ill consequence
Of being noble, poor and difficult,

Ungainly, yet too great to disregard, —
This — that born peers and friends hereditary, —
Though disinclined to help from their own store
The opprobrious wight, put penny in his poke
From private purse or leave the door ajar
When he goes wistful by at dinner-time, —
Yet, if his needs conduct him where they sit
Smugly in office, judge this, bishop that,
Dispensers of the shine and shade o' the place —
And if, friend's door shut and friend's purse undrawn,
Still potentates may find the office-seat
Do as good service at no cost — give help
By-the-bye, pay up traditional dues at once
Just through a feather-weight too much i' the scale,
Or finger-tip forgot at the balance-tongue, —
Why, only churls refuse, or Molinists.
Thus when, in the first roughness of surprise
At Guido's wolf-face whence the sheepskin fell,
The frightened couple, all bewilderment,
Rushed to the Governor, — who else rights wrong?
Told him their tale of wrong and craved redress —
Why, then the Governor woke up to the fact
That Guido was a friend of old, poor Count! —
So, promptly paid his tribute, promised the pair,
Wholesome chastisement should soon cure their qualms
Next time they came, wept, prated and told lies:
So stopped all prating, sent them dumb to Rome.
Well, now it was Pompilia's turn to try:
The troubles pressing on her, as I said,
Three times she rushed, maddened by misery,
To the other mighty man, sobbed out her prayer
At footstool of the Archbishop — fast the friend
Of her husband also! Oh, good friends of yore!
So, the Archbishop, not to be outdone

By the Governor, break custom more than he,
Thrice bade the foolish woman stop her tongue,
Unloosed her hands from harassing his gout,
Coached her and carried her to the Count again,
— His old friend should be master in his house,
Rule his wife and correct her faults at need !
Well, driven from post to pillar in this wise,
She, as a last resource, betook herself
To one, should be no family-friend at least,
A simple friar o' the city ; confessed to him,
Then told how fierce temptation of release
By self-dealt death was busy with her soul,
And urged that he put this in words, write plain
For one who could not write, set down her prayer
That Pietro and Violante, parent-like
If somehow not her parents, should for love
Come save her, pluck from out the flame the brand
Themselves had thoughtlessly thrust in so deep
To send gay-colored sparkles up and cheer
Their seat at the chimney-corner. The good friar
Promised as much at the moment ; but, alack,
Night brings discretion : he was no one's friend,
Yet presently found he could not turn about
Nor take a step i' the case and fail to tread
On someone's toe who either was a friend,
Or a friend's friend, or friend's friend thrice-removed,
And woe to friar by whom offences come !
So, the course being plain, — with a general sigh
At matrimony the profound mistake, —
He threw reluctantly the business up,
Having his other penitents to mind.

If then, all outlets thus secured save one,
At last she took to the open, stood and stared

With her wan face to see where God might wait —
And there found Caponsacchi wait as well
For the precious something at perdition's edge,
He only was predestinate to save, —
And if they recognized in a critical flash
From the zenith, each the other, her need of him,
His need of . . . say, a woman to perish for,
The regular way o' the world, yet break no vow,
Do no harm save to himself, — if this were thus ?
How do you say ? It were improbable ;
So is the legend of my patron-saint.

Anyhow, whether, as Guido states the case,
Pompilia, — like a starving wretch i' the street
Who stops and rifles the first passenger
In the great right of an excessive wrong, —
Did somehow call this stranger and he came, —
Or whether the strange sudden interview
Blazed as when star and star must needs go close
Till each hurts each and there is loss in heaven —
Whatever way in this strange world it was, —
Pompilia and Caponsacchi met, in fine,
She at her window, he i' the street beneath,
And understood each other at first look.

All was determined and performed at once.
And on a certain April evening, late
I' the month, this girl of sixteen, bride and wife
Three years and over, — she who hitherto
Had never taken twenty steps in Rome
Beyond the church, pinned to her mother's gown,
Nor, in Arezzo, knew her way through street
Except what led to the Archbishop's door, —
Such an one rose up in the dark, laid hand

On what came first, clothes and a trinket or two,
Belongings of her own in the old day, —
Stole from the side o' the sleeping spouse — who knows?
Sleeping perhaps, silent for certain, — slid
Ghost-like from great dark room to great dark room
In through the tapestries and out again
And onward, unembarrassed as a fate,
Descended staircase, gained last door of all,
Sent it wide open at first push of palm,
And there stood, first time, last and only time,
At liberty, alone in the open street, —
Unquestioned, unmolested found herself
At the city gate, by Caponsacchi's side,
Hope there, joy there, life and all good again,
The carriage there, the convoy there, light there
Broadening ever into blaze at Rome
And breaking small what long miles lay between;
Up she sprang, in he followed, they were safe.

The husband quotes this for incredible,
All of the story from first word to last:
Sees the priest's hand throughout upholding hers,
Traces his foot to the alcove, that night,
Whither and whence blindfold he knew the way,
Proficient in all craft and stealthiness;
And cites for proof a servant, eye that watched
And ear that opened to purse secrets up,
A woman-spy, — suborned to give and take
Letters and tokens, do the work of shame
The more adroitly that herself, who helped
Communion thus between a tainted pair,
Had long since been a leper thick in spot,
A common trull o' the town: she witnessed all,
Helped many meetings, partings, took her wage

And then told Guido the whole matter. Lies!
The woman's life confutes her word, — her word
Confutes itself: "Thus, thus and thus I lied."
"And thus, no question, still you lie," we say.

"Ay, but at last, e'en have it how you will,
Whatever the means, whatever the way, explodes
The consummation" — the accusers shriek:
"Here is the wife avowedly found in flight,
And the companion of her flight, a priest;
She flies her husband, he the church his spouse:
What is this?"

Wife and priest alike reply
"This is the simple thing it claims to be,
A course we took for life and honor's sake,
Very strange, very justifiable."
She says, "God put it in my head to fly,
As when the martin migrates: autumn claps
Her hands, cries 'Winter 's coming, will be here,
Off with you ere the white teeth overtake!
Flee!' So I fled: this friend was the warm day,
The south wind and whatever favors flight;
I took the favor, had the help, how else?
And so we did fly rapidly all night,
All day, all night — a longer night — again,
And then another day, longest of days,
And all the while, whether we fled or stopped,
I scarce know how or why, one thought filled both,
'Fly and arrive!' So long as I found strength
I talked with my companion, told him much,
Knowing that he knew more, knew me, knew God
And God's disposal of me, — but the sense
O' the blessed flight absorbed me in the main,

And speech became mere talking through a sleep,
Till at the end of that last longest night
In a red daybreak, when we reached an inn
And my companion whispered 'Next stage — Rome!'
Sudden the weak flesh fell like piled-up cards,
All the frail fabric at a finger's touch,
And prostrate the poor soul too, and I said
'But though Count Guido were a furlong off,
Just on me, I must stop and rest awhile!'
Then something like a huge white wave o' the sea
Broke o'er my brain and buried me in sleep
Blessedly, till it ebbed and left me loose,
And where was I found but on a strange bed
In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,
Ruddy with flame, and filled with men, in front
Who but the man you call my husband? ay —
Count Guido once more between heaven and me,
For there my heaven stood, my salvation, yes —
That Caponsacchi all my heaven of help,
Helpless himself, held prisoner in the hands
Of men who looked up in my husband's face
To take the fate thence he should signify,
Just as the way was at Arezzo. Then,
Not for my sake but his who had helped me —
I sprang up, reached him with one bound, and seized
The sword o' the felon, trembling at his side,
Fit creature of a coward, unsheathed the thing
And would have pinned him through the poison-bag
To the wall and left him there to palpitate,
As you serve scorpions, but men interposed —
Disarmed me, gave his life to him again
That he might take mine and the other lives,
And he has done so. I submit myself!"
The priest says — oh, and in the main result

The facts asseverate, he truly says,
As to the very act and deed of him,
However you mistrust the mind o' the man —
The flight was just for flight's sake, no pretext
For aught except to set Pompilia free.
He says "I cite the husband's self's worst charge
In proof of my best word for both of us.
Be it conceded that so many times
We took our pleasure in his palace: then,
What need to fly at all? — or flying no less,
What need to outrage the lips sick and white
Of a woman, and bring ruin down beside,
By halting when Rome lay one stage beyond?"
So does he vindicate Pompilia's fame,
Confirm her story in all points but one —
This; that, so fleeing and so breathing forth
Her last strength in the prayer to halt awhile,
She makes confusion of the reddening white
Which was the sunset when her strength gave way,
And the next sunrise and its whitening red
Which she revived in when her husband came:
She mixes both times, morn and eve, in one,
Having lived through a blank of night 'twixt each
Though dead-asleep, unaware as a corpse,
She on the bed above; her friend below
Watched in the doorway of the inn the while,
Stood i' the red o' the morn, that she mistakes,
In act to rouse and quicken the tardy crew
And hurry out the horses, have the stage
Over, the last league, reach Rome and be safe:
When up came Guido.
Guido's tale begins —
How he and his whole household, drunk to death
By some enchanted potion, poppied drugs

Plied by the wife, lay powerless in gross sleep
And left the spoilers unimpeded way,
Could not shake off their poison and pursue,
Till noontide, then made shift to get on horse
And did pursue: which means he took his time,
Pressed on no more than lingered after, step
By step, just making sure o' the fugitives,
Till at the nick of time, he saw his chance,
Seized it, came up with and surprised the pair.
How he must needs have gnawn lip and gnashed teeth,
Taking successively at tower and town,
Village and roadside, still the same report
"Yes, such a pair arrived an hour ago,
Sat in the carriage just where now you stand,
While we got horses ready, — turned deaf ear
To all entreaty they would even alight;
Counted the minutes and resumed their course."
Would they indeed escape, arrive at Rome,
Leave no least loop-hole to let murder through,
But foil him of his captured infamy,
Prize of guilt proved and perfect? So it seemed.
Till, oh the happy chance, at last stage, Rome
But two short hours off, Castelnuovo reached,
The guardian angel gave reluctant place,
Satan stepped forward with alacrity,
Pompilia's flesh and blood succumbed, perforce
A halt was, and her husband had his will.
Perdue he couched, counted out hour by hour
Till he should spy in the east a signal-streak —
Night had been, morrow was, triumph would be.
Do you see the plan deliciously complete?
The rush upon the unsuspecting sleep,
The easy execution, the outcry
Over the deed "Take notice all the world!

These two dead bodies, locked still in embrace, —
The man is Caponsacchi and a priest,
The woman is my wife: they fled me late,
Thus have I found and you behold them thus,
And may judge me: do you approve or no?"

Success did seem not so improbable,
But that already Satan's laugh was heard,
His black back turned on Guido — left i' the lurch
Or rather, baulked of suit and service now,
Left to improve on both by one deed more,
Burn up the better at no distant day,
Body and soul one holocaust to hell.
Anyhow, of this natural consequence
Did just the last link of the long chain snap:
For an eruption was o' the priest, alive
And alert, calm, resolute and formidable,
Not the least look of fear in that broad brow —
One not to be disposed of by surprise,
And armed moreover — who had guessed as much?
Yes, there stood he in secular costume
Complete from head to heel, with sword at side,
He seemed to know the trick of perfectly.
There was no prompt suppression of the man
As he said calmly "I have saved your wife
From death; there was no other way but this;
Of what do I defraud you except death?
Charge any wrong beyond, I answer it."
Guido, the valorous, had met his match,
Was forced to demand help instead of fight,
Bid the authorities o' the place lend aid
And make the best of a broken matter so.
They soon obeyed the summons — I suppose,
Apprised and ready, or not far to seek —

Laid hands on Caponsacchi, found in fault,
A priest yet flagrantly accoutred thus, —
Then, to make good Count Guido's further charge,
Proceeded, prisoner made lead the way,
In a crowd, upstairs to the chamber-door
Where wax-white, dead asleep, deep beyond dream,
As the priest laid her, lay Pompilia yet.

And as he mounted step and step with the crowd
How I see Guido taking heart again!
He knew his wife so well and the way of her —
How at the outbreak she would shroud her shame
In hell's heart, would it mercifully yawn —
How, failing that, her forehead to his foot,
She would crouch silent till the great doom fell,
Leave him triumphant with the crowd to see
Guilt motionless or writhing like a worm!
No! Second misadventure, this worm turned,
I told you: would have slain him on the spot
With his own weapon, but they seized her hands:
Leaving her tongue free, as it tolled the knell
Of Guido's hope so lively late. The past
Took quite another shape now. She who shrieked
"At least and for ever I am mine and God's,
Thanks to his liberating angel Death —
Never again degraded to be yours
The ignoble noble, the unmanly man,
The beast below the beast in brutishness!" —
This was the froward child, "the restif lamb
Used to be cherished in his breast," he groaned —
"Eat from his hand and drink from out his cup,
The while his fingers pushed their loving way
Through curl on curl of that soft coat — alas,
And she all silverly baaed gratitude

While meditating mischief! " — and so forth.
He must invent another story now!
The ins and outs o' the rooms were searched: he found
Or showed for found the abominable prize —
Love-letters from his wife who cannot write,
Love-letters in reply o' the priest — thank God! —
Who can write and confront his character
With this, and prove the false thing forged throughout:
Spitting whereat, he needs must spatter whom
But Guido's self? — that forged and falsified
One letter called Pompilia's, past dispute:
Then why not these to make sure still more sure?

So was the case concluded then and there:
Guido preferred his charges in due form,
Called on the law to adjudicate, consigned
The accused ones to the Prefect of the place,
(Oh mouse-birth of that mountain-like revenge!)
And so to his own place betook himself
After the spring that failed, — the wildcat's way.
The captured parties were conveyed to Rome;
Investigation followed here i' the court —
Soon to review the fruit of its own work,
From then to now being eight months and no more.
Guido kept out of sight and safe at home:
The Abate, brother Paolo, helped most
At words when deeds were out of question, pushed
Nearest the purple, best played deputy,
So, pleaded, Guido's representative
At the court shall soon try Guido's self, — what's more,
The court that also took — I told you, Sir —
That statement of the couple, how a cheat

Had been i' the birth of the babe, no child of theirs.
That was the prelude ; this, the play's first act :
Whereof we wait what comes, crown, close of all.

Well, the result was something of a shade
On the parties thus accused, — how otherwise ?
Shade, but with shine as unmistakable.
Each had a prompt defence : Pompilia first —
" Earth was made hell to me who did no harm :
I only could emerge one way from hell
By catching at the one hand held me, so
I caught at it and thereby stepped to heaven :
If that be wrong, do with me what you will ! "
Then Caponsacchi with a grave grand sweep
O' the arm as though his soul warned baseness off —
" If as a man, then much more as a priest
I hold me bound to help weak innocence :
If so my worldly reputation burst,
Being the bubble it is, why, burst it may :
Blame I can bear though not blameworthiness.
But use your sense first, see if the miscreant proved,
The man who tortured thus the woman, thus
Have not both laid the trap and fixed the lure
Over the pit should bury body and soul !
His facts are lies : his letters are the fact —
An infiltration flavored with himself !
As for the fancies — whether . . . what is it you say ?
The lady loves me, whether I love her
In the forbidden sense of your surmise, —
If, with the midday blaze of truth above,
The unlidded eye of God awake, aware,
You needs must pry about and trace the birth
Of each stray beam of light may traverse night,

To the night's sun that 's Lucifer himself,
Do so, at other time, in other place,
Not now nor here! Enough that first to last
I never touched her lip nor she my hand
Nor either of us thought a thought, much less
Spoke a word which the Virgin might not hear.
Be such your question, thus I answer it."

Then the court had to make its mind up, spoke.
"It is a thorny question, yea, a tale
Hard to believe, but not impossible:
Who can be absolute for either side?
A middle course is happily open yet.
Here has a blot surprised the social blank, —
Whether through favor, feebleness or fault,
No matter, leprosy has touched our robe
And we unclean must needs be purified.
Here is a wife makes holiday from home,
A priest caught playing truant to his church,
In masquerade moreover: both allege
Enough excuse to stop our lifted scourge
Which else would heavily fall. On the other hand,
Here is a husband, ay and man of mark,
Who comes complaining here, demands redress
As if he were the pattern of desert —
The while those plaguy allegations frown,
Forbid we grant him the redress he seeks.
To all men be our moderation known!
Rewarding none while compensating each,
Hurting all round though harming nobody,
Husband, wife, priest, scot-free not one shall 'scape,
Yet priest, wife, husband, boast the unbroken head
From application of our excellent oil:
So that, whatever be the fact, in fine,

We make no miss of justice in a sort.
First, let the husband stomach as he may,
His wife shall neither be returned him, no —
Nor branded, whipped and caged, but just consigned
To a convent and the quietude she craves;
So is he rid of his domestic plague:
What better thing can happen to a man?
Next, let the priest retire — unshent, unshamed,
Unpunished as for perpetrating crime,
But relegated (not imprisoned, Sirs!)
Sent for three years to clarify his youth
At Civita, a rest by the way to Rome:
There let his life skim off its last of lees
Nor keep this dubious color. Judged the cause:
All parties may retire, content, we hope."
That 's Rome's way, the traditional road of law;
Whither it leads is what remains to tell.

The priest went to his relegation-place,
The wife to her convent, brother Paolo
To the arms of brother Guido with the news
And this beside — his charge was countercharged;
The Comparini, his old brace of hates,
Were breathed and vigilant and venomous now —
Had shot a second bolt where the first stuck,
And followed up the pending dowry-suit
By a procedure should release the wife
From so much of the marriage-bond as barred
Escape when Guido turned the screw too much
On his wife's flesh and blood, as husband may.
No more defence, she turned and made attack,
Claimed now divorce from bed and board, in short:
Pleaded such subtle strokes of cruelty,
Such slow sure siege laid to her body and soul,

As, proved, — and proofs seemed coming thick and fast, —
Would gain both freedom and the dowry back
Even should the first suit leave them in his grasp:
So urged the Comparini for the wife.
Guido had gained not one of the good things
He grasped at by his creditable plan
O' the flight and following and the rest: the suit
That smouldered late was fanned to fury new,
This adjunct came to help with fiercer fire,
While he had got himself a quite new plague —
Found the world's face an universal grin
At this last best of the Hundred Merry Tales
Of how a young and sprightly clerk devised
To carry off a spouse that moped too much,
And cured her of the vapors in a trice:
And how the husband, playing Vulcan's part,
Told by the Sun, started in hot pursuit
To catch the lovers, and came halting up,
Cast his net and then called the Gods to see
The convicts in their rosy impudence —
Whereat said Mercury "Would that I were Mars!"
Oh it was rare, and naughty all the same!
Brief, the wife's courage and cunning, — the priest's show
Of chivalry and adroitness, — last not least,
The husband — how he ne'er showed teeth at all,
Whose bark had promised biting; but just sneaked
Back to his kennel, tail 'twixt legs, as 't were, —
All this was hard to gulp down and digest.
So pays the devil his liegeman, brass for gold.
But this was at Arezzo: here in Rome
Brave Paolo bore up against it all —
Battled it out, nor wanting to himself
Nor Guido nor the House whose weight he bore

Pillar-like, by no force of arm but brain.
He knew his Rome, what wheels to set to work;
Plied influential folk, pressed to the ear
Of the efficacious purple, pushed his way
To the old Pope's self, — past decency indeed, —
Praying him take the matter in his hands
Out of the regular court's incompetence.
But times are changed and nephews out of date
And favoritism unfashionable: the Pope
Said "Render Cæsar what is Cæsar's due!"
As for the Comparini's counter-plea,
He met that by a counter-plea again,
Made Guido claim divorce — with help so far
By the trial's issue: for, why punishment
However slight unless for guiltiness
However slender? — and a molehill serves
Much as a mountain of offence this way.
So was he gathering strength on every side
And growing more and more to menace — when
All of a terrible moment came the blow
That beat down Paolo's fence, ended the play
O' the foil and brought mannaia on the stage.

Five months had passed now since Pompilia's flight,
Months spent in peace among the Convert nuns.
This, — being, as it seemed, for Guido's sake
Solely, what pride might call imprisonment
And quote as something gained, to friends at home, —
This naturally was at Guido's charge:
Grudge it he might, but penitential fare,
Prayers, preachings, who but he defrayed the cost?
So, Paolo dropped, as proxy, doit by doit
Like heart's blood, till — what's here? What notice comes?

The convent's self makes application bland
That, since Pompilia's health is fast o' the wane,
She may have leave to go combine her cure
Of soul with cure of body, mend her mind
Together with her thin arms and sunk eyes
That want fresh air outside the convent-wall,
Say in a friendly house, — and which so fit
As a certain villa in the Pauline way,
That happens to hold Pietro and his wife,
The natural guardians? "Oh, and shift the care
You shift the cost, too; Pietro pays in turn,
And lightens Guido of a load! And then,
Villa or convent, two names for one thing,
Always the sojourn means imprisonment,
Domus pro carcere — nowise we relax,
Nothing abate: how answers Paolo?"
You,
What would you answer? All so smooth and fair,
Even Paul's astuteness sniffed no harm i' the world.
He authorized the transfer, saw it made
And, two months after, reaped the fruit of the same,
Having to sit down, rack his brain and find
What phrase should serve him best to notify
Our Guido that by happy providence
A son and heir, a babe was born to him
I' the villa, — go tell sympathizing friends!
Yes, such had been Pompilia's privilege:
She, when she fled was one month gone with child,
Known to herself or unknown, either way
Availing to explain (say men of art)
The strange and passionate precipitance
Of maiden startled into motherhood
Which changes body and soul by nature's law.
So when the she-dove breeds, strange yearnings come

For the unknown shelter by undreamed-of shores,
And there is born a blood-pulse in her heart
To fight if needs be, though with flap of wing,
For the wool-flock or the fur-tuft, though a hawk
Contest the prize, — wherefore, she knows not yet.
Anyhow, thus to Guido came the news.
"I shall have quitted Rome ere you arrive
To take the one step left," — wrote Paolo.
Then did the winch o' the winepress of all hate,
Vanity, disappointment, grudge and greed,
Take the last turn that screws out pure revenge
With a bright bubble at the brim beside —
By an heir's birth he was assured at once
O' the main prize, all the money in dispute:
Pompilia's dowry might revert to her
Or stay with him as law's caprice should point, —
But now — now — what was Pietro's shall be hers,
What was hers shall remain her own, — if hers,
Why then, — oh, not her husband's but — her heir's!
That heir being his too, all grew his at last
By this road or by that road, since they join.
Before, why, push he Pietro out o' the world, —
The current of the money stopped, you see,
Pompilia being proved no Pietro's child:
Or let it be Pompilia's life he quenched,
Again the current of the money stopped, —
Guido debarred his rights as husband soon,
So the new process threatened; — now, the chance,
Now, the resplendent minute! Clear the earth,
Cleanse the house, let the three but disappear
A child remains, depositary of all,
That Guido may enjoy his own again,
Repair all losses by a master-stroke,
Wipe out the past, all done all left undone,

Swell the good present to best evermore,
Die into new life, which let blood baptize!

So, i' the blue of a sudden sulphur-blaze,
Both why there was one step to take at Rome,
And why he should not meet with Paolo there,
He saw — the ins and outs to the heart of hell —
And took the straight line thither swift and sure.
He rushed to Vittiano, found four sons o' the soil,
Brutes of his breeding, with one spark i' the clod
That served for a soul, the looking up to him
Or aught called Franceschini as life, death,
Heaven, hell, — lord paramount, assembled these,
Harangued, equipped, instructed, pressed each clod
With his will's imprint; then took horse, plied spur,
And so arrived, all five of them, at Rome
On Christmas-Eve, and forthwith found themselves
Installed i' the vacancy and solitude
Left them by Paolo, the considerate man
Who, good as his word, had disappeared at once
As if to leave the stage free. A whole week
Did Guido spend in study of his part,
Then played it fearless of a failure. One,
Struck the year's clock whereof the hours are days,
And off was rung o' the little wheels the chime
"Good will on earth and peace to man:" but, two,
Proceeded the same bell and, evening come,
The dreadful five felt finger-wise their way
Across the town by blind cuts and black turns
To the little lone suburban villa; knocked —
"Who may be outside?" called a well-known voice.
"A friend of Caponsacchi's bringing friends
A letter."

That 's a test, the excusers say:

Ay, and a test conclusive, I return.
What? Had that name brought touch of guilt or taste
Of fear with it, aught to dash the present joy
With memory of the sorrow just at end, —
She, happy in her parents' arms at length
With the new blessing of the two weeks' babe, —
How had that name's announcement moved the wife?
Or, as the other slanders circulate,
Were Caponsacchi no rare visitant
On nights and days whither safe harbor lured,
What bait had been i' the name to ope the door?
The promise of a letter? Stealthy guests
Have secret watchwords, private entrances:
The man's own self might have been found inside
And all the scheme made frustrate by a word.
No: but since Guido knew, none knew so well,
The man had never since returned to Rome
Nor seen the wife's face more than villa's front,
So, could not be at hand to warn or save, —
For that, he took this sure way to the end.

"Come in," bade poor Violante cheerfully,
Drawing the door-bolt: that death was the first,
Stabbed through and through. Pietro, close on her heels,
Set up a cry — "Let me confess myself!
Grant but confession!" Cold steel was the grant.
Then came Pompilia's turn.
Then they escaped.
The noise o' the slaughter roused the neighborhood.
They had forgotten just the one thing more
Which saves i' the circumstance, the ticket to-wit
Which puts post-horses at a traveller's use:
So, all on foot, desperate through the dark
Reeled they like drunkards along open road,

Accomplished a prodigious twenty miles
Homeward, and gained Baccano very near,
Stumbled at last, deaf, dumb, blind through the feat,
Into a grange and, one dead heap, slept there
Till the pursuers hard upon their trace
Reached them and took them, red from head to heel,
And brought them to the prison where they lie.
The couple were laid i' the church two days ago,
And the wife lives yet by miracle.

All is told.
You hardly need ask what Count Guido says,
Since something he must say. "I own the deed —"
(He cannot choose, — but —) "I declare the same
Just and inevitable, — since no way else
Was left me, but by this of taking life,
To save my honor which is more than life.
I exercised a husband's rights." To which
The answer is as prompt — "There was no fault
In any one o' the three to punish thus:
Neither i' the wife, who kept all faith to you,
Nor in the parents, whom yourself first duped,
Robbed and maltreated, then turned out of doors.
You wronged and they endured wrong; yours the fault.
Next, had endurance overpassed the mark
And turned resentment needing remedy, —
Nay, put the absurd impossible case, for once —
You were all blameless of the blame alleged
And they blameworthy where you fix all blame,
Still, why this violation of the law?
Yourself elected law should take its course,
Avenge wrong, or show vengeance not your right;
Why, only when the balance in law's hand
Trembles against you and inclines the way

O' the other party, do you make protest,
Renounce arbitrament, flying out of court,
And crying 'Honor's hurt the sword must cure'?
Aha, and so i' the middle of each suit
Trying i' the courts, — and you had three in play
With an appeal to the Pope's self beside, —
What, you may chop and change and right your wrongs,
Leaving the law to lag as she thinks fit?"

That were too temptingly commodious, Count!
One would have still a remedy in reserve
Should reach the safest oldest sinner, you see!
One's honor forsooth? Does that take hurt alone
From the extreme outrage? I who have no wife,
Being yet sensitive in my degree
As Guido, — must discover hurt elsewhere
Which, half compounded-for in days gone by,
May profitably break out now afresh,
Need cure from my own expeditious hands.
The lie that was, as it were, imputed me
When you objected to my contract's clause, —
The theft as good as, one may say, alleged,
When you, co-heir in a will, excepted, Sir,
To my administration of effects,
— Aha, do you think law disposed of these?
My honor 's touched and shall deal death around!
Count, that were too commodious, I repeat!
If any law be imperative on us all,
Of all are you the enemy: out with you
From the common light and air and life of man!

IV.

TERTIUM QUID.

[Book IV. presents the condescending point of view of a critic who assumes to be the mouth-piece of the superior class, and to deliver the enlightened and authoritative opinion on the case. Indifference takes the place, here, of any special sympathy with either side, the speaker's only solicitude being to do himself credit in the eyes of his distinguished listeners, and to steer clear of any prejudices they may have. Accordingly, both sides are alternately elaborated, with a great show of cleverness, and the conclusion is lost in a mist of neutrality.]

TRUE, Excellency — as his Highness says,
Though she 's not dead yet, she 's as good as stretched
Symmetrical beside the other two ;
Though he 's not judged yet, he 's the same as judged,
So do the facts abound and superabound :
And nothing hinders that we lift the case
Out of the shade into the shine, allow
Qualified persons to pronounce at last,
Nay, edge in an authoritative word
Between this rabble's-brabble of dolts and fools
Who make up reasonless unreasoning Rome.
" Now for the Trial ! " they roar : " the Trial to test
The truth, weigh husband and weigh wife alike
I' the scales of law, make one scale kick the beam ! "
Law 's a machine from which, to please the mob,

Truth the divinity must needs descend
And clear things at the play's fifth act — aha!
Hammer into their noddles who was who
And what was what. I tell the simpletons
"Could law be competent to such a feat
'T were done already: what begins next week
Is end o' the Trial, last link of a chain
Whereof the first was forged three years ago
When law addressed herself to set wrong right,
And proved so slow in taking the first step
That ever some new grievance, — tort, retort,
On one or the other side, — o'ertook i' the game,
Retarded sentence, till this deed of death
Is thrown in, as it were, last bale to boat
Crammed to the edge with cargo — or passengers?
'*Trecentos inseris: ohe, jam satis est!*
Huc appelle!' — passengers, the word must be."
Long since, the boat was loaded to my eyes.
To hear the rabble and brabble, you 'd call the case
Fused and confused past human finding out.
One calls the square round, t' other the round square —
And pardonably in that first surprise
O' the blood that fell and splashed the diagram:
But now we 've used our eyes to the violent hue
Can't we look through the crimson and trace lines?
It makes a man despair of history,
Eusebius and the established fact — fig's end!
Oh, give the fools their Trial, rattle away
With the leash of lawyers, two on either side —
One barks, one bites, — Masters Arcangeli
And Spreti, — that 's the husband's ultimate hope
Against the Fisc and the other kind of Fisc,
Bound to do barking for the wife: bow — wow!
Why, Excellency, we and his Highness here

Would settle the matter as sufficiently
As ever will Advocate This and Fiscal That
And Judge the Other, with even — a word and a wink —
We well know who for ultimate arbiter.
Let us beware o' the basset-table — lest
We jog the elbow of Her Eminence,
Jostle his cards, — he 'll rap you out a . . . st !
By the window-seat ! And here 's the Marquis too !
Indulge me but a moment : if I fail
— Favored with such an audience, understand ! —
To set things right, why, class me with the mob
As understander of the mind of man !

The mob, — now, that 's just how the error comes !
Bethink you that you have to deal with *plebs*,
The commonalty ; this is an episode
In burgess-life, — why seek to aggrandize,
Idealize, denaturalize the class ?
People talk just as if they had to do
With a noble pair that . . . Excellency, your ear !
Stoop to me, Highness, — listen and look yourselves !
This Pietro, this Violante, live their life
At Rome in the easy way that 's far from worst
Even for their betters, — themselves love themselves,
Spend their own oil in feeding their own lamp
That their own faces may grow bright thereby.
They get to fifty and over : how 's the lamp ?
Full to the depth o' the wick, — moneys so much ;
And also with a remnant, — so much more
Of moneys, — which there 's no consuming now,
But, when the wick shall moulder out some day,
Failing fresh twist of tow to use up dregs,
Will lie a prize for the passer-by, — to-wit
Anyone that can prove himself the heir,

Seeing, the couple are wanting in a child:
Meantime their wick swims in the safe broad bowl
O' the middle rank, — not raised a beacon's height
For wind to ravage, nor dropped till lamp graze ground
Like cresset, mudlarks poke now here now there,
Going their rounds to probe the ruts i' the road
Or fish the luck o' the puddle. Pietro's soul
Was satisfied when cronies smirked, "No wine
Like Pietro's, and he drinks it every day!"
His wife's heart swelled her boddice, joyed its fill
When neighbors turned heads wistfully at church,
Sighed at the load of lace that came to pray.
Well, having got through fifty years of flare,
They burn out so, indulge so their dear selves,
That Pietro finds himself in debt at last,
As he were any lordling of us all:
And, now that dark begins to creep on day,
Creditors grow uneasy, talk aside,
Take counsel, then importune all at once.
For if the good fat rosy careless man,
Who has not laid a ducat by, decease —
Let the lamp fall, no heir at hand to catch —
Why, being childless, there 's a spilth i' the street
O' the remnant, there 's a scramble for the dregs
By the stranger: so, they grant him no long day
But come in a body, clamor to be paid.

What 's his resource? He asks and straight obtains
The customary largess, dole dealt out
To, what we call our "poor dear shame-faced ones,"
In secret once a month to spare the shame
O' the slothful and the spendthrift, — pauper-saints
The Pope puts meat i' the mouth of, ravens they,
And providence he — just what the mob admires!

That is, instead of putting a prompt foot
On selfish worthless human slugs whose slime
Has failed to lubricate their path in life,
Why, the Pope picks the first ripe fruit that falls
And gracious puts it in the vermin's way.
Pietro could never save a dollar? Straight
He must be subsidized at our expense:
And for his wife — the harmless household sheep
One ought not to see harassed in her age —
Judge, by the way she bore adversity,
O' the patient nature you ask pity for!
How long, now, would the roughest marketman,
Handling the creatures huddled to the knife,
Harass a mutton ere she made a mouth
Or menaced biting? Yet the poor sheep here,
Violante, the old innocent burgess-wife,
In her first difficulty showed great teeth
Fit to crunch up and swallow a good round crime.
She meditates the tenure of the Trust,
Fidei commissum is the lawyer-phrase,
These funds that only want an heir to take —
Goes o'er the gamut o' the creditor's cry
By semitones from whine to snarl high up
And growl down low, one scale in sundry keys, —
Pauses with a little compunction for the face
Of Pietro frustrate of its ancient cheer, —
Never a bottle now for friend at need, —
Comes to a stop on her own frittered lace
And neighborly condolences thereat,
Then makes her mind up, sees the thing to do:
And so, deliberate, snaps house-book clasp,
Posts off to vespers, missal beneath arm,
Passes the proper San Lorenzo by,
Dives down a little lane to the left, is lost

In a labyrinth of dwellings best unnamed,
Selects a certain blind one, black at base,
Blinking at top, — the sign of we know what, —
One candle in a casement set to wink
Streetward, do service to no shrine inside, —
Mounts thither by the filthy flight of stairs,
Holding the cord by the wall, to the tip-top,
Gropes for the door i' the dark, ajar of course,
Raps, opens, enters in : up starts a thing
Naked as needs be — " What, you rogue, 't is you ?
Back, — how can I have taken a farthing yet ?
Mercy on me, poor sinner that I am !
Here 's . . . why, I took you for Madonna's self
With all that sudden swirl of silk i' the place !
What may your pleasure be, my bonny dame ? "
Your Excellency supplies aught left obscure ?
One of those women that abound in Rome,
Whose needs oblige them eke out one poor trade
By another vile one : her ostensible work
Was washing clothes, out in the open air
At the cistern by Citorio ; her true trade —
Whispering to idlers, when they stopped and praised
The ankles she let liberally shine
In kneeling at the slab by the fountain-side,
That there was plenty more to criticise
At home, that eve, i' the house where candle blinked
Decorously above, and all was done
I' the holy fear of God and cheap beside.
Violante, now, had seen this woman wash,
Noticed and envied her propitious shape,
Tracked her home to her house-top, noted too,
And now was come to tempt her and propose
A bargain far more shameful than the first
Which trafficked her virginity away

For a melon and three pauls at twelve years old.
Five minutes' talk with this poor child of Eve,
Struck was the bargain, business at an end —
"Then, six months hence, that person whom you trust,
Comes, fetches whatsoever babe it be;
I keep the price and secret, you the babe,
Paying beside for mass to make all straight:
Meantime, I pouch the earnest-money-piece."

Down stairs again goes fumbling by the rope
Violante, triumphing in a flourish of fire
From her own brain, self-lit by such success, —
Gains church in time for the "*Magnificat*"
And gives forth "My reproof is taken away,
And blessed shall mankind proclaim me now,"
So that the officiating priest turns round
To see who proffers the obstreperous praise:
Then home to Pietro, the enraptured-much
But puzzled-more when told the wondrous news —
How orisons and works of charity,
(Beside that pair of pinners and a coif,
Birth-day surprise last Wednesday was five weeks)
Had borne fruit in the autumn of his life, —
They, or the Orvieto in a double dose.
Anyhow, she must keep house next six months,
Lie on the settle, avoid the three-legged stool,
And, chiefly, not be crossed in wish or whim,
And the result was like to be an heir.

Accordingly, when time was come about,
He found himself the sire indeed of this
Francesca Vittoria Pompilia and the rest
O' the names whereby he sealed her his, next day.
A crime complete in its way is here, I hope?

Lies to God, lies to man, every way lies
To nature and civility and the mode:
Flat robbery of the proper heirs thus foiled
O' the due succession, — and, what followed thence,
Robbery of God, through the confessor's ear
Debarred the most note-worthy incident
When all else done and undone twelve-month through
Was put in evidence at Easter-time.
All other peccadillos! — but this one
To the priest who comes next day to dine with us?
'T were inexpedient; decency forbade.

Is so far clear? You know Violante now,
Compute her capability of crime
By this authentic instance? Black hard cold
Crime like a stone you kick up with your foot
I' the middle of a field?

I thought as much.
But now, a question, — how long does it lie,
The bad and barren bit of stuff you kick,
Before encroached on and encompassed round
With minute moss, weed, wild-flower — made alive
By worm, and fly, and foot of the free bird?
Your Highness, — healthy minds let bygones be,
Leave old crimes to grow young and virtuous-like
I' the sun and air; so time treats ugly deeds:
They take the natural blessing of all change.
There was the joy o' the husband silly-sooth,
The softening of the wife's old wicked heart,
Virtues to right and left, profusely paid
If so they might compensate the saved sin.
And then the sudden existence, dewy-dear,
O' the rose above the dungheap, the pure child
As good as new created, since withdrawn

From the horror of the pre-appointed lot
With the unknown father and the mother known
Too well, — some fourteen years of squalid youth,
And then libertinage, disease, the grave —
Hell in life here, hereafter life in hell:
Look at that horror and this soft repose!
Why, moralist, the sin has saved a soul!
Then, even the palpable grievance to the heirs —
'Faith, this was no frank setting hand to throat
And robbing a man, but . . . Excellency, by your leave,
How did you get that marvel of a gem,
The sapphire with the Graces grand and Greek?
The story is, stooping to pick a stone
From the pathway through a vineyard — no-man's-land —
To pelt a sparrow with, you chanced on this:
Why now, do those five clowns o' the family
O' the vinedresser digest their porridge worse
That not one keeps it in his goatskin pouch
To do flint's service with the tinder-box?
Don't cheat me, don't cheat you, don't cheat a friend,
But are you so hard on who jostles just
A stranger with no natural sort of claim
To the havings and the holdings (here 's the point)
Unless by misadventure, and defect
Of that which ought to be — nay, which there 's none
Would dare so much as wish to profit by —
Since who dares put in just so many words
"May Pietro fail to have a child, please God!
So shall his house and goods belong to me,
The sooner that his heart will pine betimes"?
Well then, God does n't please, nor heart shall pine!
Because he has a child at last, you see,
Or selfsame thing as though a child it were,

He thinks, whose sole concern it is to think:
If he accepts it why should you demur?

Moreover, say that certain sin there seem,
The proper process of unsinning sin
Is to begin well-doing somehow else.
Pietro, — remember, with no sin at all
I' the substitution, — why, this gift of God
Flung in his lap from over Paradise
Steadied him a moment, set him straight
On the good path he had been straying from.
Henceforward no more wilfulness and waste,
Cuppings, carousings, — these a sponge wiped out.
All sort of self-denial was easy now
For the child's sake, the chatelaine to be,
Who must want much and might want who knows what?
And so, the debts were paid, habits reformed,
Expense curtailed, the dowry set to grow.
As for the wife, — I said, hers the whole sin:
So, hers the exemplary penance. 'T was a text
Whereon folk preached and praised, the district through:
"Oh, make us happy and you make us good!
It all comes of God giving her a child:
Such graces follow God's best earthly gift!"

Here you put by my guard, pass to my heart
By the home-thrust — "There 's a lie at base of all."
Why, thou exact Prince, is it a pearl or no,
Yon globe upon the Principessa's neck?
That great round glory of pellucid stuff,
A fish secreted round a grain of grit!
Do you call it worthless for the worthless core?
(She does n't, who well knows what she changed for it.)
So, to our brace of burgesses again!

You see so far i' the story, who was right,
Who wrong, who neither, don't you? What, you don't?
Eh? Well, admit there 's somewhat dark i' the case,
Let 's on — the rest shall clear, I promise you.
Leap over a dozen years: you find, these past,
An old good easy creditable sire,
A careful housewife's beaming bustling face,
Both wrapped up in the love of their one child,
The strange tall pale beautiful creature grown
Lily-like out o' the cleft i' the sun-smit rock
To bow its white miraculous birth of buds
I' the way of wandering Joseph and his spouse, —
So painters fancy: here it was a fact.
And this their lily, — could they but transplant
And set in vase to stand by Solomon's porch
'Twixt lion and lion! — this Pompilia of theirs,
Could they see worthily married, well bestowed,
In house and home! And why despair of this
With Rome to choose from, save the topmost rank?
Themselves would help the choice with heart and soul,
Throw their late savings in a common heap
To go with the dowry, and be followed in time
By the heritage legitimately hers:
And when such paragon was found and fixed,
Why, they might chant their "*Nunc dimittis*" straight.

Indeed the prize was simply full to a fault,
Exorbitant for the suitor they should seek,
And social class should choose among, these cits.
Yet there 's a latitude: exceptional white
Amid the general brown o' the species, lurks
A burgess nearly an aristocrat,
Legitimately in reach: look out for him!
What banker, merchant, has seen better days,

What second-rate painter a-pushing up,
Poet a-slipping down, shall bid the best
For this young beauty with the thumping purse?
Alack, were it but one of such as these
So like the real thing that they pass for it,
All had gone well! Unluckily, poor souls,
It proved to be the impossible thing itself,
Truth and not sham: hence ruin to them all.

For, Guido Franceschini was the head
Of an old family in Arezzo, old
To that degree they could afford be poor
Better than most: the case is common too.
Out of the vast door 'scutcheoned overhead,
Creeps out a serving-man on Saturdays
To cater for the week, — turns up anon
I' the market, chaffering for the lamb's least leg,
Or the quarter-fowl, less entrails, claws and comb:
Then back again with prize, — a liver begged
Into the bargain, gizzard overlooked.
He 's mincing these to give the beans a taste,
When, at your knock, he leaves the simmering soup,
Waits on the curious stranger-visitant,
Napkin in half-wiped hand, to show the rooms,
Point pictures out have hung their hundred years,
"Priceless," he tells you, — puts in his place at once
The man of money: yes, you 're banker-king
Or merchant-kaiser, wallow in your wealth
While patron, the house-master, can't afford
To stop our ceiling-hole that rain so rots:
But he 's the man of mark, and there 's his shield,
And yonder 's the famed Rafael, first in kind,
The painter painted for his grandfather,
And you have paid to see: "Good morning, Sir!"

Such is the law of compensation. Still
The poverty was getting nigh acute ;
There gaped so many noble mouths to feed,
Beans must suffice unflavored of the fowl.
The mother, — hers would be a spun-out life
I' the nature of things ; the sisters had done well
And married men of reasonable rank :
But that sort of illumination stops,
Throws back no heat upon the parent-hearth.
The family instinct felt out for its fire
To the Church, — the Church traditionally helps
A second son : and such was Paolo,
Established here at Rome these thirty years,
Who played the regular game, — priest and Abate,
Made friends, owned house and land, became of use
To a personage : his course lay clear enough.
The youngest caught the sympathetic flame,
And, though unfledged wings kept him still i' the cage,
Yet he shot up to be a Canon, so
Clung to the higher perch and crowed in hope.
Even our Guido, eldest brother, went
As far i' the way o' the Church as safety seemed,
He being Head o' the House, ordained to wive, —
So, could but dally with an Order or two
And testify good-will i' the cause : he clipped
His top-hair and thus far affected Christ.
But main promotion must fall otherwise,
Though still from the side o' the Church : and here was he
At Rome, since first youth, worn threadbare of soul
By forty-six years' rubbing on hard life,
Getting fast tired o' the game whose word is — "Wait !"
When one day, — he too having his Cardinal

To serve in some ambiguous sort, as serve
To draw the coach the plumes o' the horses' heads, —
The Cardinal saw fit to dispense with him,
Ride with one plume the less ; and off it dropped.

Guido thus left, — with a youth spent in vain
And not a penny in purse to show for it, —
Advised with Paolo, bent no doubt in chafe
The black brows somewhat formidably, growled
" Where is the good I came to get at Rome ?
Where the repayment of the servitude
To a purple popinjay, whose feet I kiss,
Knowing his father wiped the shoes of mine ? "
" Patience," pats Paolo the recalcitrant —
" You have not had, so far, the proper luck,
Nor do my gains suffice to keep us both :
A modest competency is mine, not more.
You are the Count however, yours the style,
Heirdom and state, — you can't expect all good.
Had I, now, held your hand of cards . . . well,
well —
What 's yet unplayed, I 'll look at, by your leave,
Over your shoulder, — I who made my game,
Let 's see, if I can't help to handle yours.
Fie on you, all the Honors in your fist,
Countship, Househeadship, — how have you misdealt !
Why, in the first place, these will marry a man !
Notum tonsoribus ! To the Tonsor then !
Come, clear your looks, and choose your freshest suit,
And, after function 's done with, down we go
To the woman-dealer in perukes, a wench
I and some others settled in the shop
At Place Colonna : she 's an oracle. Hmm !
' Dear, 't is my brother : brother, 't is my dear.

Dear, give us counsel ! Whom do you suggest
As properest party in the quarter round
For the Count here ? — he is minded to take wife,
And further tells me he intends to slip
Twenty zecchines under the bottom-scalp
Of his old wig when he sends it to revive
For the wedding : and I add a trifle too.
You know what personage I 'm potent with.' "
And so plumped out Pompilia's name the first.
She told them of the household and its ways,
The easy husband and the shrewder wife
In Via Vittoria, — how the tall young girl,
With hair black as yon patch and eyes as big
As yon pomander to make freckles fly,
Would have so much for certain, and so much more
In likelihood, — why, it suited, slipped as smooth
As the Pope's pantoufle does on the Pope's foot.
" I 'll to the husband ! " Guido ups and cries.
" Ay, so you 'd play your last court-card, no doubt ! "
Puts Paolo in with a groan — " Only, you see,
'T is I, this time, that supervise your lead.
Priests play with women, maids, wives, mothers — why ?
These play with men and take them off our hands.
Did I come, counsel with some cut-beard gruff
Or rather this sleek young-old barberess ?
Go, brother, stand you rapt in the ante-room
Of Her Efficacity my Cardinal
For an hour, — he likes to have lord-suitors lounge, —
While I betake myself to the gray mare,
The better horse, — how wise the people's word ! —
And wait on Madam Violante."
Said and done.
He was at Via Vittoria in three skips :

Proposed at once to fill up the one want
O' the burgess-family which, wealthy enough,
And comfortable to heart's desire, yet crouched
Outside a gate to heaven, — locked, bolted, barred,
Whereof Count Guido had a key he kept
Under his pillow, but Pompilia's hand
Might slide behind his neck and pilfer thence.
The key was fairy; its mere mention made
Violante feel the thing shoot one sharp ray
That reached the womanly heart: so — "I assent!
Yours be Pompilia, hers and ours that key
To all the glories of the greater life!
There's Pietro to convince: leave that to me!"

Then was the matter broached to Pietro; then
Did Pietro make demand and get response
That in the Countship was a truth, but in
The counting up of the Count's cash, a lie.
He thereupon stroked grave his chin, looked great,
Declined the honor. Then the wife wiped tear,
Winked with the other eye turned Paolo-ward,
Whispered Pompilia, stole to church at eve,
Found Guido there and got the marriage done,
And finally begged pardon at the feet
Of her dear lord and master. Whereupon
Quoth Pietro — "Let us make the best of things!"
"I knew your love would license us," quoth she:
Quoth Paolo once more, "Mothers, wives and maids,
These be the tools wherewith priests manage men."

Now, here take breath and ask, — which bird o' the brace
Decoyed the other into clapnet? Who
Was fool, who knave? Neither and both, perchance.
There was a bargain mentally proposed

On each side, straight and plain and fair enough;
Mind knew its own mind: but when mind must speak,
The bargain have expression in plain terms,
There came the blunder incident to words,
And in the clumsy process, fair turned foul.
The straight backbone-thought of the crooked speech
Were just — "I Guido truck my name and rank
For so much money and youth and female charms. —
We Pietro and Violante give our child
And wealth to you for a rise i' the world thereby."
Such naked truth while chambered in the brain
Shocks nowise: walk it forth by way of tongue, —
Out on the cynical unseemliness!
Hence was the need, on either side, of a lie
To serve as decent wrappage: so, Guido gives
Money for money, — and they, bride for groom,
Having, he, not a doit, they, not a child
Honestly theirs, but this poor waif and stray.
According to the words, each cheated each;
But in the inexpressive barter of thoughts,
Each did give and did take the thing designed,
The rank on this side and the cash on that —
Attained the object of the traffic, so.
The way of the world, the daily bargain struck
In the first market! Why sells Jack his ware?
"For the sake of serving an old customer."
Why does Jill buy it? "Simply not to break
A custom, pass the old stall the first time."
Why, you know where the gist is of the exchange:
Each sees a profit, throws the fine words in.
Don't be too hard o' the pair! Had each pretence
Been simultaneously discovered, stript
From off the body o' the transaction, just
As when a cook (will Excellency forgive?)

Strips away those long rough superfluous legs
From either side the crayfish, leaving folk
A meal all meat henceforth, no garnishry,
(With your respect, Prince!) — balance had been kept,
No party blamed the other, — so, starting fair,
All subsequent fence of wrong returned by wrong
I' the matrimonial thrust and parry, at least
Had followed on equal terms. But, as it chanced,
One party had the advantage, saw the cheat
Of the other first and kept its own concealed:
And the luck o' the first discovery fell, beside,
To the least adroit and self-possessed o' the pair.
'T was foolish Pietro and his wife saw first
The nobleman was penniless, and screamed
"We are cheated!"

Such unprofitable noise
Angers at all times: but when those who plague,
Do it from inside your own house and home,
Gnats which yourself have closed the curtain round,
Noise goes too near the brain and makes you mad.
The gnats say, Guido used the candle-flame
Unfairly, — worsened that first bad of his,
By practising all kinds of cruelty
To oust them and suppress the wail and whine, —
That speedily he so scared and bullied them,
Fain were they, long before five months had passed,
To beg him grant, from what was once their wealth,
Just so much as would help them back to Rome
Where, when they finished paying the last doit
O' the dowry, they might beg from door to door.
So say the Comparini — as if it came
Of pure resentment for this worse than bad,
That then Violante, feeling conscience prick,

Confessed her substitution of the child
Whence all the harm fell, — and that Pietro first
Bethought him of advantage to himself
I' the deed, as part revenge, part remedy
For all miscalculation in the pact.

On the other hand "Not so!" Guido retorts —
"I am the wronged, solely, from first to last,
Who gave the dignity I engaged to give,
Which was, is, cannot but continue gain.
My being poor was a bye-circumstance,
Miscalculated piece of untowardness,
Might end to-morrow did heaven's windows ope,
Or uncle die and leave me his estate.
You should have put up with the minor flaw,
Getting the main prize of the jewel. If wealth,
Not rank, had been prime object in your thoughts,
Why not have taken the butcher's son, the boy
O' the baker or candlestick-maker? In all the rest,
It was yourselves broke compact and played false,
And made a life in common impossible.
Show me the stipulation of our bond
That you should make your profit of being inside
My house, to hustle and edge me out o' the same,
First make a laughing-stock of mine and me,
Then round us in the ears from morn to night
(Because we show wry faces at your mirth)
That you are robbed, starved, beaten and what not!
You fled a hell of your own lighting-up,
Pay for your own miscalculation too:
You thought nobility, gained at any price,
Would suit and satisfy, — find the mistake,
And now retaliate, not on yourselves, but me.
And how? By telling me, i' the face of the world,

I it is have been cheated all this while,
Abominably and irreparably, — my name
Given to a cur-cast mongrel, a drab's brat,
A beggar's bye-blow, — thus depriving me
Of what yourselves allege the whole and sole
Aim on my part i' the marriage, — money to-wit.
This thrust I have to parry by a guard
Which leaves me open to a counter-thrust
On the other side, — no way but there 's a pass
Clean through me. If I prove, as I hope to do,
There 's not one truth in this your odious tale
O' the buying, selling, substituting — prove
Your daughter was and is your daughter, — well,
And her dowry hers and therefore mine, — what then?
Why, where 's the appropriate punishment for this
Enormous lie hatched for mere malice' sake
To ruin me? Is that a wrong or no?
And if I try revenge for remedy,
Can I well make it strong and bitter enough?"

I anticipate however — only ask,
Which of the two here sinned most? A nice point!
Which brownness is least black, — decide who can,
Wager-by-battle-of-cheating! What do you say,
Highness? Suppose, your Excellency, we leave
The question at this stage, proceed to the next,
Both parties step out, fight their prize upon,
In the eye o' the world?
They brandish law 'gainst law;
The grinding of such blades, each parry of each,
Throws terrible sparks off, over and above the thrusts,
And makes more sinister the fight, to the eye,
Than the very wounds that follow. Beside the tale
Which the Comparini have to re-assert,

They needs must write, print, publish all abroad
The straitnesses of Guido's household life —
The petty nothings we bear privately
But break down under when fools flock to jeer.
What is it all to the facts o' the couple's case,
How helps it prove Pompilia not their child,
If Guido's mother, brother, kith and kin
Fare ill, lie hard, lack clothes, lack fire, lack food?
That 's one more wrong than needs.

On the other hand,
Guido, — whose cue is to dispute the truth
O' the tale, reject the shame it throws on him, —
He may retaliate, fight his foe in turn
And welcome, we allow. Ay, but he can't!
He 's at home, only acts by proxy here:
Law may meet law, — but all the gibes and jeers,
The superfluity of naughtiness,
Those libels on his House, — how reach at them?
Two hateful faces, grinning all a-glow,
Not only make parade of spoil they filched,
But foul him from the height of a tower, you see.
Unluckily temptation is at hand —
To take revenge on a trifle overlooked,
A pet lamb they have left in reach outside,
Whose first bleat, when he plucks the wool away,
Will strike the grinners grave: his wife remains
Who, four months earlier, some thirteen years old,
Never a mile away from mother's house
And petted to the height of her desire,
Was told one morning that her fate had come,
She must be married — just as, a month before,
Her mother told her she must comb her hair
And twist her curls into one knot behind.

These fools forgot their pet lamb, fed with flowers,
Then 'ticed as usual by the bit of cake,
Out of the bower into the butchery.
Plague her, he plagues them threefold: but how plague?
The world may have its word to say to that:
You can't do some things with impunity.
What remains . . . well, it is an ugly thought . . .
But that he drive herself to plague herself—
Herself disgrace herself and so disgrace
Who seek to disgrace Guido?
There 's the clue
To what else seems gratuitously vile,
If, as is said, from this time forth the rack
Was tried upon Pompilia: 't was to wrench
Her limbs into exposure that brings shame.
The aim o' the cruelty being so crueller still,
That cruelty almost grows compassion's self
Could one attribute it to mere return
O' the parents' outrage, wrong avenging wrong.
They see in this a deeper deadlier aim,
Not to vex just a body they held dear,
But blacken too a soul they boasted white,
And show the world their saint in a lover's arms,
No matter how driven thither,—so they say.

On the other hand, so much is easily said,
And Guido lacks not an apologist.
The pair had nobody but themselves to blame,
Being selfish beasts throughout, no less, no more:
—Cared for themselves, their supposed good, naught else,
And brought about the marriage; good proved bad,
As little they cared for her its victim — nay,
Meant she should stay behind and take the chance,
If haply they might wriggle themselves free.

They baited their own hook to catch a fish
With this poor worm, failed o' the prize, and then
Sought how to unbait tackle, let worm float
Or sink, amuse the monster while they 'scaped.
Under the best stars Hymen brings above,
Had all been honesty on either side,
A common sincere effort to good end,
Still, this would prove a difficult problem, Prince!
— Given, a fair wife, aged thirteen years,
A husband poor, care-bitten, sorrow-sunk,
Little, long-nosed, bush-bearded, lantern-jawed,
Forty-six years old, — place the two grown one,
She, cut off sheer from every natural aid,
In a strange town with no familiar face —
He, in his own parade-ground or retreat
If need were, free from challenge, much less check
To an irritated, disappointed will —
How evolve happiness from such a match?
'T were hard to serve up a congenial dish
Out of these ill-agreeing morsels, Duke,
By the best exercise of the cook's craft,
Best interspersion of spice, salt and sweet!
But let two ghastly scullions concoct mess
With brimstone, pitch, vitriol and devil's-dung —
Throw in abuse o' the man, his body and soul,
Kith, kin and generation, shake all slab
At Rome, Arezzo, for the world to nose,
Then end by publishing, for fiend's arch-prank,
That, over and above sauce to the meat's self,
Why, even the meat, bedevilled thus in dish,
Was never a pheasant but a carrion-crow —
Prince, what will then the natural loathing be?
What wonder if this? — the compound plague o' the pair
Pricked Guido, — not to take the course they hoped,

That is, submit him to their statement's truth,
Accept its obvious promise of relief,
And thrust them out of doors the girl again
Since the girl's dowry would not enter there,
— Quit of the one if balked of the other: no!
Rather did rage and hate so work in him,
Their product proved the horrible conceit
That he should plot and plan and bring to pass
His wife might, of her own free will and deed,
Relieve him of her presence, get her gone,
And yet leave all the dowry safe behind,
Confirmed his own henceforward past dispute,
While blotting out, as by a belch of hell,
Their triumph in her misery and death.

You see, the man was Aretine, had touch
O' the subtle air that breeds the subtle wit;
Was noble too, of old blood thrice-refined
That shrinks from clownish coarseness in disgust:
Allow that such an one may take revenge,
You don't expect he 'll catch up stone and fling,
Or try cross-buttock, or whirl quarter-staff?
Instead of the honest drubbing clowns bestow,
When out of temper at the dinner spoilt,
On meddling mother-in-law and tiresome wife, —
Substitute for the clown a nobleman,
And you have Guido, practising, 't is said,
Immitigably from the very first,
The finer vengeance: this, they say, the fact
O' the famous letter shows — the writing traced
At Guido's instance by the timid wife
Over the pencilled words himself writ first —
Wherein she, who could neither write nor read,
Was made unblushingly declare a tale

To the brother, the Abate then in Rome,
How her putative parents had impressed,
On their departure, their enjoinment; bade
"We being safely arrived here, follow, you!
Poison your husband, rob, set fire to all,
And then by means o' the gallant you procure
With ease, by helpful eye and ready tongue,
Some brave youth ready to dare, do and die,
You shall run off and merrily reach Rome
Where we may live like flies in honey-pot:" —
Such being exact the programme of the course
Imputed her as carried to effect.

They also say, — to keep her straight therein,
All sort of torture was piled, pain on pain,
On either side Pompilia's path of life,
Built round about and over against by fear,
Circumvallated month by month, and week
By week, and day by day, and hour by hour,
Close, closer and yet closer still with pain,
No outlet from the encroaching pain save just
Where stood one saviour like a piece of heaven,
Hell's arms would strain round butfor this blue gap.
She, they say further, first tried every chink,
Every imaginable break i' the fire,
As way of escape: ran to the Commissary,
Who bade her not malign his friend her spouse;
Flung herself thrice at the Archbishop's feet,
Where three times the Archbishop let her lie,
Spend her whole sorrow and sob full heart forth,
And then took up the slight load from the ground
And bore it back for husband to chastise, —
Mildly of course, — but natural right is right.
So went she slipping ever yet catching at help,

Missing the high till come to lowest and last,
To-wit a certain friar of mean degree,
Who heard her story in confession, wept,
Crossed himself, showed the man within the monk.
"Then, will you save me, you the one i' the world?
I cannot even write my woes, nor put
My prayer for help in words a friend may read, —
I no more own a coin than have an hour
Free of observance, — I was watched to church,
Am watched now, shall be watched back presently, —
How buy the skill of scribe i' the market-place?
Pray you, write down and send whatever I say
O' the need I have my parents take me hence!"
The good man rubbed his eyes and could not choose —
Let her dictate her letter in such a sense
That parents, to save breaking down a wall,
Might lift her over: she went back, heaven in heart.
Then the good man took counsel of his couch,
Woke and thought twice, the second thought the best:
"Here am I, foolish body that I be,
Caught all but pushing, teaching, who but I,
My betters their plain duty, — what, I dare
Help a case the Archbishop would not help,
Mend matters, peradventure, God loves mar?
What hath the married life but strifes and plagues
For proper dispensation? So a fool
Once touched the ark, — poor Uzzah that I am!
Oh married ones, much rather should I bid,
In patience all of ye possess your souls!
This life is brief and troubles die with it:
Where were the prick to soar up homeward else?"
So saying, he burnt the letter he had writ,
Said *Ave* for her intention, in its place,
Took snuff and comfort, and had done with all.

Then the grim arms stretched yet a little more
And each touched each, all but one streak i' the midst,
Whereat stood Caponsacchi, who cried, "This way,
Out by me! Hesitate one moment more
And the fire shuts out me and shuts in you!
Here my hand holds you life out!" Whereupon
She clasped the hand, which closed on hers and drew
Pompilia out o' the circle now complete.
Whose fault or shame but Guido's? — ask her friends.

But then this is the wife's — Pompilia's tale —
Eve's . . . no, not Eve's, since Eve, to speak the truth,
Was hardly fallen (our candor might pronounce)
When simply saying in her own defence
"The serpent tempted me and I did eat."
So much of paradisal nature, Eve's!
Her daughters ever since prefer to urge
"Adam so starved me I was fain accept
The apple any serpent pushed my way."
What an elaborate theory have we here,
Ingeniously nursed up, pretentiously
Brought forth, pushed forward amid trumpet-blast,
To account for the thawing of an icicle,
Show us there needed Ætna vomit flame
Ere run the crystal into dew-drops! Else,
How, unless hell broke loose to cause the step,
How could a married lady go astray?
Bless the fools! And 't is just this way they are blessed,
And the world wags still, — because fools are sure
— Oh, not of my wife nor your daughter! No!
But of their own: the case is altered quite.
Look now, — last week, the lady we all love, —
Daughter o' the couple we all venerate,
Wife of the husband we all cap before,

Mother o' the babes we all breathe blessings on, —
Was caught in converse with a negro page.
Hell thawed that icicle, else "Why was it —
Why?" asked and echoed the fools. "Because, you fools, —"
So did the dame's self answer, she who could,
With that fine candor only forthcoming
When 't is no odds whether withheld or no —
"Because my husband was the saint you say,
And, — with that childish goodness, absurd faith,
Stupid self-satisfaction, you so praise, —
Saint to you, insupportable to me.
Had he, — instead of calling me fine names,
Lucretia and Susanna and so forth,
And curtaining Correggio carefully
Lest I be taught that Leda had two legs, —
— But once never so little tweaked my nose
For peeping through my fan at Carnival,
Confessing thereby 'I have no easy task —
I need use all my powers to hold you mine,
And then, — why 't is so doubtful if they serve,
That — take this, as an earnest of despair!'
Why, we were quits: I had wiped the harm away,
Thought 'The man fears me!' and foregone revenge."
We must not want all this elaborate work
To solve the problem why young Fancy-and-flesh
Slips from the dull side of a spouse in years,
Betakes it to the breast of Brisk-and-bold
Whose love-scrapes furnish talk for all the town!

Accordingly one word on the other side
Tips over the piled-up fabric of a tale.
Guido says — that is, always, his friends say —
It is unlikely from the wickedness,

That any man treat any woman so.
The letter in question was her very own,
Unprompted and unaided: she could write —
As able to write as ready to sin, or free,
When there was danger, to deny both facts.
He bids you mark, herself from first to last
Attributes all the so-styled torture just
To jealousy, — jealousy of whom but just
This very Caponsacchi! How suits here
This with the other alleged motive, Prince?
Would Guido make a terror of the man
He meant should tempt the woman, as they charge?
Do you fright your hare that you may catch your hare?
Consider too, the charge was made and met
At the proper time and place where proofs were plain —
Heard patiently and disposed of thoroughly
By the highest powers, possessors of most light,
The Governor for the law, and the Archbishop
For the gospel: which acknowledged primacies,
'T is impudently pleaded, he could warp
Into a tacit partnership with crime —
He being the while, believe their own account,
Impotent, penniless and miserable!
He further asks — Duke, note the knotty point! —
How he, — concede him skill to play such part
And drive his wife into a gallant's arms, —
Could bring the gallant to play his part too
And stand with arms so opportunely wide?
How bring this Caponsacchi, — with whom, friends
And foes alike agree, throughout his life
He never interchanged a civil word
Nor lifted courteous cap to — him how bend
To such observancy of beck and call,

— To undertake this strange and perilous feat
For the good of Guido, using, as the lure,
Pompilia whom, himself and she avouch,
He had nor spoken with nor seen, indeed,
Beyond sight in a public theatre,
When she wrote letters (she that could not write!)
The importunate shamelessly-protested love
Which brought him, though reluctant, to her feet,
And forced on him the plunge which, howsoe'er
She might swim up i' the whirl, must bury him
Under abysmal black: a priest contrive
No better, no amour to be hushed up,
But open flight and noon-day infamy?
Try and concoct defence for such revolt!
Take the wife's tale as true, say she was wronged, —
Pray, in what rubric of the breviary
Do you find it registered — the part of a priest
Is — that to right wrongs from the church he skip,
Go journeying with a woman that 's a wife,
And be pursued, o'ertaken and captured . . . how?
In a lay-dress, playing the kind sentinel
Where the wife sleeps (says he who best should know)
And sleeping, sleepless, both have spent the night!
Could no one else be found to serve at need —
No woman — or if man, no safer sort
Than this not well-reputed turbulence?

Then, look into his own account o' the case!
He, being the stranger and astonished one,
Yet received protestations of her love
From lady neither known nor cared about:
Love, so protested, bred in him disgust
After the wonder, — or incredulity,
Such impudence seeming impossible.

But, soon assured such impudence might be,
When he had seen with his own eyes at last
Letters thrown down to him i' the very street
From behind lattice where the lady lurked,
And read their passionate summons to her side —
Why then, a thousand thoughts swarmed up and in, —
How he had seen her once, a moment's space,
Observed she was both young and beautiful,
Heard everywhere report she suffered much
From a jealous husband thrice her age, — in short
There flashed the propriety, expediency
Of treating, trying might they come to terms,
— At all events, granting the interview
Prayed for, one so adapted to assist
Decision as to whether he advance,
Stand or retire, in his benevolent mood!
Therefore the interview befell at length;
And at this one and only interview,
He saw the sole and single course to take —
Bade her dispose of him, head, heart and hand,
Did her behest and braved the consequence,
Not for the natural end, the love of man
For woman whether love be virtue or vice,
But, please you, altogether for pity's sake —
Pity of innocence and helplessness!
And how did he assure himself of both?
Had he been the house-inmate, visitor,
Eye-witness of the described martyrdom,
So, competent to pronounce its remedy
Ere rush on such extreme and desperate course —
Involving such enormity of harm,
Moreover, to the husband judged thus, doomed
And damned without a word in his defence?
Not he! the truth was felt by instinct here,

— Process which saves a world of trouble and time.
There 's the priest's story : what do you say to it,
Trying its truth by your own instinct too,
Since that 's to be the expeditious mode ?
" And now, do hear my version," Guido cries :
" I accept argument and inference both.
It would indeed have been miraculous
Had such a confidency sprung to birth
With no more fanning from acquaintanceship
Than here avowed by my wife and this priest.
Only, it did not : you must substitute
The old stale unromantic way of fault,
The commonplace adventure, mere intrigue
In prose form with the unpoetic tricks,
Cheatings and lies : they used the hackney chair
Satan jaunts forth with, shabby and serviceable,
No gilded gimcrack-novelty from below,
To bowl you along thither, swift and sure.
That same officious go-between, the wench
Who gave and took the letters of the two,
Now offers self and service back to me :
Bears testimony to visits night by night
When all was safe, the husband far and away, —
To many a timely slipping out at large
By light o' the morning-star, ere he should wake.
And when the fugitives were found at last,
Why, with them were found also, to belie
What protest they might make of innocence,
All documents yet wanting, if need were,
To establish guilt in them, disgrace in me —
The chronicle o' the converse from its rise
To culmination in this outrage : read !
Letters from wife to priest, from priest to wife, —
Here they are, read and say where they chime in

With the other tale, superlative purity
O' the pair of saints ! I stand or fall by these."

But then on the other side again, — how say
The pair of saints ? That not one word is theirs —
No syllable o' the batch or writ or sent
Or yet received by either of the two.
" Found," says the priest, " because he needed them,
Failing all other proofs, to prove our fault :
So, here they are, just as is natural.
Oh yes — we had our missives, each of us !
Not these, but to the full as vile, no doubt :
Hers as from me, — she could not read, so burnt, —
Mine as from her, — I burnt because I read.
Who forged and found them ? *Cui profuerint !*"
(I take the phrase out of your Highness' mouth)
" He who would gain by her fault and my fall,
The trickster, schemer and pretender — he
Whose whole career was lie entailing lie
Sought to be sealed truth by the worst lie last ! "

Guido rejoins — " Did the other end o' the tale
Match this beginning ! 'T is alleged I prove
A murderer at the end, a man of force
Prompt, indiscriminate, effectual : good !
Then what need all this trifling woman' s-work,
Letters and embassies and weak intrigue,
When will and power were mine to end at once
Safely and surely ? Murder had come first
Not last with such a man, assure yourselves !
The silent acquetta, stilling at command —
A drop a day i' the wine or soup, the dose, —
The shattering beam that breaks above the bed
And beats out brains, with nobody to blame
Except the wormy age which eats even oak, —

Nay, the staunch steel or trusty cord, — who cares
I' the blind old palace, a pitfall at each step,
With none to see, much more to interpose
O' the two, three, creeping house-dog-servant-things
Born mine and bred mine ? Had I willed gross death,
I had found nearer paths to thrust him prey
Than this that goes meandering here and there
Through half the world and calls down in its course
Notice and noise, — hate, vengeance, should it fail,
Derision and contempt though it succeed !
Moreover, what o' the future son and heir ?
The unborn babe about to be called mine, —
What end in heaping all this shame on him,
Were I indifferent to my own black share ?
Would I have tried these crookednesses, say,
Willing and able to effect the straight ? ''

" Ay, would you ! " — one may hear the priest retort,
" Being as you are, i' the stock, a man of guile,
And ruffianism but an added graft.
You, a born coward, try a coward's arms,
Trick and chicane, — and only when these fail
Does violence follow, and like fox you bite
Caught out in stealing. Also, the disgrace
You hardly shrunk at, wholly shrivelled her :
You plunged her thin white delicate hand i' the flame
Along with your coarse horny brutish fist,
Held them a second there, then drew out both
— Yours roughed a little, hers ruined through and through.
Your hurt would heal forthwith at ointment's touch —
Namely, succession to the inheritance
Which bolder crime had lost you : let things change,
The birth o' the boy warrant the bolder crime,

Why, murder was determined, dared and done.
For me," the priest proceeds with his reply,
"The look o' the thing, the chances of mistake,
All were against me, — that, I knew the first:
But, knowing also what my duty was,
I did it: I must look to men more skilled
In reading hearts than ever was the world."

Highness, decide! Pronounce, Her Excellency!
Or . . . even leave this argument in doubt,
Account it a fit matter, taken up
With all its faces, manifold enough,
To ponder on — what fronts us, the next stage,
Next legal process? Guido, in pursuit,
Coming up with the fugitives at the inn,
Caused both to be arrested then and there
And sent to Rome for judgment on the case —
Thither, with all his armory of proofs,
Betook himself: 't is there we 'll meet him now,
Waiting the further issue.
Here you smile
"And never let him henceforth dare to plead, —
Of all pleas and excuses in the world
For any deed hereafter to be done, —
His irrepressible wrath at honor's wound!
Passion and madness irrepressible?
Why, Count and cavalier, the husband comes
And catches foe i' the very act of shame!
There 's man to man, — nature must have her way, —
We look he should have cleared things on the spot.
Yes, then, indeed — even tho' it prove he erred —
Though the ambiguous first appearance, mount
Of solid injury, melt soon to mist,
Still, — had he slain the lover and the wife —

Or, since she was a woman and his wife,
Slain him, but stript her naked to the skin
Or at best left no more of an attire
Than patch sufficient to pin paper to,
Some one love-letter, infamy and all,
As passport to the Paphos fit for such,
Safe-conduct to her natural home the stews, —
Good! One had recognized the power o' the pulse.
But when he stands, the stock-fish, — sticks to law —
Offers the hole in his heart, all fresh and warm,
For scrivener's pen to poke and play about —
Can stand, can stare, can tell his beads perhaps,
Oh, let us hear no syllable o' the rage!
Such rage were a convenient afterthought
For one who would have shown his teeth belike,
Exhibited unbridled rage enough,
Had but the priest been found, as was to hope,
In serge, not silk, with crucifix, not sword:
Whereas the gray innocuous grub, of yore,
Had hatched a hornet, tickle to the touch,
The priest was metamorphosed into knight.
And even the timid wife, whose cue was — shriek,
Bury her brow beneath his trampling foot, —
She too sprang at him like a pythoness:
So, gulp down rage, passion must be postponed,
Calm be the word! Well, our word is — we brand
This part o' the business, howsoever the rest
Befall."
"Nay," interpose as prompt his friends —
"This is the world's way! So you adjudge reward
To the forbearance and legality
Yourselves begin by inculcating — ay,
Exacting from us all with knife at throat!
This one wrong more you add to wrong's amount, —

You publish all, with the kind comment here,
'Its victim was too cowardly for revenge.'"
Make it your own case, — you who stand apart!
The husband wakes one morn from heavy sleep,
With a taste of poppy in his mouth, — rubs eyes,
Finds his wife flown, his strong box ransacked too,
Follows as he best can, overtakes i' the end.
You bid him use his privilege: well, it seems
He 's scarce cool-blooded enough for the right move —
Does not shoot when the game were sure, but stands
Bewildered at the critical minute, — since
He has the first flash of the fact alone
To judge from, act with, not the steady lights
Of after-knowledge, — yours who stand at ease
To try conclusions: he 's in smother and smoke,
You outside, with explosion at an end:
The sulphur may be lightning or a squib —
He 'll know in a minute, but till then, he doubts.
Back from what you know to what he knew not!
Hear the priest's lofty "I am innocent,"
The wife's as resolute "You are guilty!" Come!
Are you not staggered? — pause, and you lose the move!
Naught left you but a low appeal to law,
"Coward" tied to your tail for compliment!
Another consideration: have it your way!
Admit the worst: his courage failed the Count,
He 's cowardly like the best o' the burgesses
He 's grown incorporate with, — a very cur,
Kick him from out your circle by all means!
Why, trundled down this reputable stair,
Still, the Church-door lies wide to take him in,
And the Court-porch also: in he sneaks to each, —
"Yes, I have lost my honor and my wife,
And, being moreover an ignoble hound,

I dare not jeopardize my life for them!"
Religion and Law lean forward from their chairs,
"Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" Ay,
Not only applaud him that he scorned the world,
But punish should he dare do otherwise.
If the case be clear or turbid, — you must say!

Thus, anyhow, it mounted to the stage
In the law-courts, — let 's see clearly from this point! —
Where the priest tells his story true or false,
And the wife her story, and the husband his,
All with result as happy as before.
The courts would nor condemn nor yet acquit
This, that or the other, in so distinct a sense
As end the strife to either's absolute loss:
Pronounced, in place of something definite,
"Each of the parties, whether goat or sheep
I' the main, has wool to show and hair to hide.
Each has brought somehow trouble, is somehow cause
Of pains enough, — even though no worse were proved.
Here is a husband, cannot rule his wife
Without provoking her to scream and scratch
And scour the fields, — causelessly, it may be:
Here is that wife, — who makes her sex our plague,
Wedlock, our bugbear, — perhaps with cause enough:
And here is the truant priest o' the trio, worst
Or best — each quality being conceivable.
Let us impose a little mulct on each.
We punish youth in state of pupilage
Who talk at hours when youth is bound to sleep,
Whether the prattle turn upon Saint Rose
Or Donna Olimpia of the Vatican:
'T is talk, talked wisely or unwisely talked,
I' the dormitory where to talk at all,

Transgresses, and is mulct: as here we mean.
For the wife, — let her betake herself, for rest,
After her run, to a house of Convertites —
Keep there, as good as real imprisonment:
Being sick and tired, she will recover so.
For the priest, spritely strayer out of bounds,
Who made Arezzo hot to hold him, — Rome
Profits by his withdrawal from the scene.
Let him be relegate to Civita,
Circumscribed by its bounds till matters mend:
There he at least lies out o' the way of harm
From foes — perhaps from the too friendly fair.
And finally for the husband, whose rash rule
Has but itself to blame for this ado, —
If he be vexed that, in our judgments dealt,
He fails obtain what he accounts his right,
Let him go comforted with the thought, no less,
That, turn each sentence howsoever he may,
There 's satisfaction to extract therefrom.
For, does he wish his wife proved innocent?
Well, she 's not guilty, he may safely urge,
Has missed the stripes dishonest wives endure —
This being a fatherly pat o' the cheek, no more.
Does he wish her guilty? Were she otherwise
Would she be locked up, set to say her prayers,
Prevented intercourse with the outside world,
And that suspected priest in banishment,
Whose portion is a further help i' the case?
Oh, ay, you all of you want the other thing,
The extreme of law, some verdict neat, complete, —
Either, the whole o' the dowry in your poke
With full release from the false wife, to boot,
And heading, hanging for the priest, beside —
Or, contrary, claim freedom for the wife,

Repayment of each penny paid her spouse,
Amends for the past, release for the future! Such
Is wisdom to the children of this world;
But we 've no mind, we children of the light,
To miss the advantage of the golden mean,
And push things to the steel point." Thus the courts.

Is it settled so far? Settled or disturbed,
Console yourselves: 't is like . . . an instance, now!
You 've seen the puppets, of Place Navona, play, —
Punch and his mate, — how threats pass, blows are dealt,
And a crisis comes: the crowd or clap or hiss
Accordingly as disposed for man or wife —
When down the actors duck awhile perdue,
Donning what novel rag-and-feather trim
Best suits the next adventure, new effect:
And, — by the time the mob is on the move,
With something like a judgment *pro* and *con*, —
There 's a whistle, up again the actors pop
In t' other tatter with fresh-tinselled staves,
To re-engage in one last worst fight more
Shall show, what you thought tragedy was farce.
Note, that the climax and the crown of things
Invariably is, the devil appears himself,
Armed and accoutred, horns and hoofs and tail!
Just so, nor otherwise it proved — you 'll see:
Move to the murder, never mind the rest!

Guido, at such a general duck-down,
I' the breathing-space, — of wife to convent here,
Priest to his relegation, and himself
To Arezzo, — had resigned his part perforce
To brother Abate, who bustled, did his best,
Retrieved things somewhat, managed the three suits —
Since, it should seem, there were three suits-at-law

Behoved him look to, still, lest bad grow worse:
First civil suit, — the one the parents brought,
Impugning the legitimacy of his wife,
Affirming thence the nullity of her rights:
This was before the Rota, — Molinès,
That 's judge there, made that notable decree
Which partly leaned to Guido, as I said, —
But Pietro had appealed against the same
To the very court will judge what we judge now —
Tommati and his fellows, — Suit the first.
Next civil suit, — demand on the wife's part
Of separation from the husband's bed
On plea of cruelty and risk to life —
Claims restitution of the dowry paid,
Immunity from paying any more:
This second, the Vicegerent has to judge.
Third and last suit, — this time, a criminal one, —
Answer to, and protection from, both these, —
Guido's complaint of guilt against his wife
In the Tribunal of the Governor,
Venturini, also judge of the present cause.
Three suits of all importance plaguing him,
Beside a little private enterprise
Of Guido's, — essay at a shorter cut.
For Paolo, knowing the right way at Rome,
Had, even while superintending these three suits
I' the regular way, each at its proper court,
Ingeniously made interest with the Pope
To set such tedious regular forms aside,
And, acting the supreme and ultimate judge,
Declare for the husband and against the wife.
Well, at such crisis and extreme of straits, —
The man at bay, buffeted in this wise, —
Happened the strangest accident of all.

"Then," sigh friends, "the last feather broke his back,
Made him forget all possible remedies
Save one — he rushed to, as the sole relief
From horror and the abominable thing."
"Or rather," laugh foes, "then did there befall
The luckiest of conceivable events,
Most pregnant with impunity for him,
Which henceforth turned the flank of all attack,
And bade him do his wickedest and worst."
— The wife's withdrawal from the Convertites,
Visit to the villa where her parents lived,
And birth there of his babe. Divergence here!
I simply take the facts, ask what they show.

First comes this thunderclap of a surprise:
Then follow all the signs and silences
Premonitory of earthquake. Paolo first
Vanished, was swept off somewhere, lost to Rome:
(Wells dry up, while the sky is sunny and blue.)
Then Guido girds himself for enterprise,
Hies to Vittiano, counsels with his steward,
Comes to terms with four peasants young and bold,
And starts for Rome the Holy, reaches her
At very holiest, for 't is Christmas Eve,
And makes straight for the Abate's dried-up font,
The lodge where Paolo ceased to work the pipes.
And then, rest taken, observation made
And plan completed, all in a grim week,
The five proceed in a body, reach the place,
— Pietro's, at the Paolina, silent, lone,
And stupefied by the propitious snow.
'T is one i' the evening: knock: a voice "Who's there?"
"Friends with a letter from the priest your friend."
At the door, straight smiles old Violante's self.

She falls, — her son-in-law stabs through and through,
Reaches through her at Pietro — "With your son
This is the way to settle suits, good sire!"
He bellows "Mercy for heaven, not for earth!
Leave to confess and save my sinful soul,
Then do your pleasure on the body of me!"
— "Nay, father, soul with body must take its chance!"
He presently got his portion and lay still.
And last, Pompilia rushes here and there
Like a dove among the lightnings in her brake,
Falls also: Guido's, this last husband's-act.
He lifts her by the long dishevelled hair,
Holds her away at arm's length with one hand,
While the other tries if life come from the mouth —
Looks out his whole heart's hate on the shut eyes,
Draws a deep satisfied breath, "So — dead at last!"
Throws down the burden on dead Pietro's knees,
And ends all with "Let us away, my boys!"

And, as they left by one door, in at the other
Tumbled the neighbors — for the shrieks had pierced
To the mill and the grange, this cottage and that shed.
Soon followed the Public Force; pursuit began
Though Guido had the start and chose the road:
So, that same night was he, with the other four,
Overtaken near Baccano, — where they sank
By the way-side, in some shelter meant for beasts,
And now lay heaped together, nuzzling swine,
Each wrapped in bloody cloak, each grasping still
His unwiped weapon, sleeping all the same
The sleep o' the just, — a journey of twenty miles
Brought just and unjust to a level, you see.
The only one i' the world that suffered aught
By the whole night's toil and trouble, flight and chase,

Was just the officer who took them, Head
O' the Public Force, — Patrizj, zealous soul,
Who, having but duty to sustain weak flesh,
Got heated, caught a fever and so died:
A warning to the over-vigilant,
— Virtue in a chafe should change her linen quick,
Lest pleurisy get start of providence.
(That 's for the Cardinal, and told, I think !)

Well, they bring back the company to Rome.
Says Guido, "By your leave, I fain would ask
How you found out 't was I who did the deed?
What put you on my trace, a foreigner,
Supposed in Arezzo, — and assuredly safe
Except for an oversight: who told you, pray?"
"Why, naturally your wife!" Down Guido drops
O' the horse he rode, — they have to steady and stay,
At either side the brute that bore him, bound,
So strange it seemed his wife should live and speak!
She had prayed — at least so people tell you now —
For but one thing to the Virgin for herself,
Not simply, — as did Pietro 'mid the stabs, —
Time to confess and get her own soul saved —
But time to make the truth apparent, truth
For God's sake, lest men should believe a lie:
Which seems to have been about the single prayer
She ever put up, that was granted her.
With this hope in her head, of telling truth, —
Being familiarized with pain, beside, —
She bore the stabbing to a certain pitch
Without a useless cry, was flung for dead
On Pietro's lap, and so attained her point.
Her friends subjoin this — have I done with them? —
And cite the miracle of continued life

(She was not dead when I arrived just now)
As attestation to her probity.

Does it strike your Excellency? Why, your Highness,
The self-command and even the final prayer,
Our candor must acknowledge explicable
As easily by the consciousness of guilt.
So, when they add that her confession runs
She was of wifehood one white innocence
In thought, word, act, from first of her short life
To last of it; praying, i' the face of death,
That God forgive her other sins — not this,
She is charged with and must die for, that she failed
Anyway to her husband: while thereon
Comments the old Religious — "So much good,
Patience beneath enormity of ill,
I hear to my confusion, woe is me,
Sinner that I stand, shamed in the walk and gait
I have practised and grown old in, by a child!" —
Guido's friends shrug the shoulder, "Just this same
Prodigious absolute calm in the last hour
Confirms us, — being the natural result
Of a life which proves consistent to the close.
Having braved heaven and deceived earth throughout,
She braves still and deceives still, gains thereby
Two ends, she prizes beyond earth or heaven:
First sets her lover free, imperilled sore
By the new turn things take: he answers yet
For the part he played: they have summoned him indeed:
The past ripped up, he may be punished still:
What better way of saving him than this?
Then, — thus she dies revenged to the uttermost
On Guido, drags him with her in the dark,
The lower still the better, do you doubt?

Thus, two ways, does she love her love to the end,
And hate her hate, — death, hell is no such price
To pay for these, — lovers and haters hold."
But there 's another parry for the thrust.
"Confession," cry folks — "a confession, think!
Confession of the moribund is true!"
Which of them, my wise friends? This public one,
Or the private other we shall never know?
The private may contain, — your casuists teach, —
The acknowledgment of, and the penitence for,
That other public one, so people say.
However it be, — we trench on delicate ground,
Her Eminence is peeping o'er the cards, —
Can one find nothing in behalf of this
Catastrophe? Deaf folks accuse the dumb!
You criticise the drunken reel, fool's speech,
Maniacal gesture of the man, — we grant!
But who poured poison in his cup, we ask?
Recall the list of his excessive wrongs,
First cheated in his wife, robbed by her kin,
Rendered anon the laughing-stock o' the world
By the story, true or false, of his wife's birth, —
The last seal publicly apposed to shame
By the open flight of wife and priest, — why, Sirs,
Step out of Rome a furlong, would you know
What anotherguess tribunal than ours here,
Mere worldly Court without the help of grace,
Thinks of just that one incident o' the flight?
Guido preferred the same complaint before
The court at Arezzo, bar of the Granduke, —
In virtue of it being Tuscany
Where the offence had rise and flight began, —
Self-same complaint he made in the sequel here
Where the offence grew to the full, the flight

Ended: offence and flight, one fact judged twice
By two distinct tribunals, — what result?
There was a sentence passed at the same time
By Arezzo and confirmed by the Granduke,
Which nothing balks of swift and sure effect
But absence of the guilty, (flight to Rome
Frees them from Tuscan jurisdiction now)
— Condemns the wife to the opprobrious doom
Of all whom law just lets escape from death.
The Stinche, House of Punishment, for life, —
That 's what the wife deserves in Tuscany:
Here, she deserves — remitting with a smile
To her father's house, main object of the flight!
The thief presented with the thing he steals!

At this discrepancy of judgments — mad,
The man took on himself the office, judged;
And the only argument against the use
O' the law he thus took into his own hands
Is . . . what, I ask you? — that, revenging wrong,
He did not revenge sooner, kill at first
Whom he killed last! That is the final charge.
Sooner? What 's soon or late i' the case? — ask we.
A wound i' the flesh no doubt wants prompt redress;
It smarts a little to-day, well in a week,
Forgotten in a month; or never, or now, revenge!
But a wound to the soul? That rankles worse and worse.
Shall I comfort you, explaining — "Not this once
But now it may be some five hundred times
I called you ruffian, pandar, liar and rogue:
The injury must be less by lapse of time?
The wrong is a wrong, one and immortal too,

And that you bore it those five hundred times,
Let it rankle unrevenged five hundred years,
Is just five hundred wrongs the more and worse!
Men, plagued this fashion, get to explode this way,
If left no other.

"But we left this man
Many another way, and there's his fault,"
'T is answered — "He himself preferred our arm
O' the law to fight his battle with. No doubt
We did not open him an armory
To pick and choose from, use, and then reject.
He tries one weapon and fails, — he tries the next
And next: he flourishes wit and common sense,
They fail him, — he plies logic doughtily,
It fails him too, — thereon, discovers last
He has been blind to the combustibles —
That all the while he is a-glow with ire,
Boiling with irrepressible rage, and so
May try explosives and discard cold steel, —
So hires assassins, plots, plans, executes!
Is this the honest self-forgetting rage
We are called to pardon? Does the furious bull
Pick out four help-mates from the grazing herd
And journey with them over hill and dale
Till he find his enemy?"

What rejoinder? save
That friends accept our bull-similitude.
Bull-like, — the indiscriminate slaughter, rude
And reckless aggravation of revenge,
Were all i' the way o' the brute who never once
Ceases, amid all provocation more,
To bear in mind the first tormentor, first

Giver o' the wound that goaded him to fight :
And, though a dozen follow and reinforce
The aggressor, wound in front and wound in flank,
Continues undisturbedly pursuit,
And only after prostrating his prize
Turns on the pettier, makes a general prey.
So Guido rushed against Violante, first
Author of all his wrongs, *fons et origo*
Malorum, — drops first, deluge since, — which done,
He finished with the rest. Do you blame a bull ?

In truth you look as puzzled as ere I preached !
How is that ? There are difficulties perhaps
On any supposition, and either side.
Each party wants too much, claims sympathy
For its object of compassion, more than just.
Cry the wife's friends, " O the enormous crime
Caused by no provocation in the world ! "
" Was not the wife a little weak ? " — inquire —
" Punished extravagantly, if you please,
But meriting a little punishment ?
One treated inconsiderately, say,
Rather than one deserving not at all
Treatment and discipline o' the harsher sort ? "
No, they must have her purity itself,
Quite angel, — and her parents angels too
Of an aged sort, immaculate, word and deed :
At all events, so seeming, till the fiend,
Even Guido, by his folly, forced from them
The untoward avowal of the trick o' the birth,
Which otherwise were safe and secret now.
Why, here you have the awfulest of crimes
For nothing ! Hell broke loose on a butterfly !
A dragon born of rose-dew and the moon !

Yet here is the monster! Why, he's a mere man —
Born, bred and brought up in the usual way.
His mother loves him, still his brothers stick
To the good fellow of the boyish games;
The Governor of his town knows and approves,
The Archbishop of the place knows and assists:
Here he has Cardinal This to vouch for the past,
Cardinal That to trust for the future, — match
And marriage were a Cardinal's making, — in short,
What if a tragedy be acted here
Impossible for malice to improve,
And innocent Guido with his innocent four
Be added, all five, to the guilty three,
That we of these last days be edified
With one full taste o' the justice of the world?

The long and the short is, truth seems what I show: —
Undoubtedly no pains ought to be spared
To give the mob an inkling of our lights.
It seems unduly harsh to put the man
To the torture, as I hear the court intends,
Though readiest way of twisting out the truth;
He is noble, and he may be innocent.
On the other hand, if they exempt the man
(As it is also said they hesitate
On the fair ground, presumptive guilt is weak
I' the case of nobility and privilege), —
What crime that ever was, ever will be,
Deserves the torture? Then abolish it!
You see the reduction *ad absurdum*, Sirs?

Her Excellency must pronounce, in fine!
What, she prefers going and joining play?

Her Highness finds it late, intends retire?
I am of their mind: only, all this talk talked,
'T was not for nothing that we talked, I hope?
Both know as much about it, now, at least,
As all Rome: no particular thanks, I beg!
(You 'll see, I have not so advanced myself,
After my teaching the two idiots here!)

V.

COUNT GUIDO FRANCESCHINI.

[In Book V. Guido, having confessed to the murder under torture, presents his defence, in the course of which he tells the story from his point of view. He makes the most of the undoubted appearances in his favor, namely, the cheat perpetrated upon him by Violante and the elopement of Pompilia, by putting the worst possible construction upon them; he represents himself as justified in his actions because of the failure on the part of the so-called parents and Pompilia to fulfil their share of the agreement, and as goaded on, finally, when he hears of the birth of a child, to commit the murder as the lawful and only means by which he can vindicate his outraged honor.]

Thanks, Sir, but, should it please the reverend Court,
I feel I can stand somehow, half sit down
Without help, make shift to even speak, you see,
Fortified by the sip of . . . why, 't is wine,
Velletri, — and not vinegar and gall,
So changed and good the times grow! Thanks, kind Sir!
Oh, but one sip 's enough! I want my head
To save my neck, there 's work awaits me still.
How cautious and considerate . . . aie, aie, aie,
Nor your fault, sweet Sir! Come, you take to heart
An ordinary matter. Law is law.
Noblemen were exempt, the vulgar thought,
From racking; but, since law thinks otherwise,

I have been put to the rack: all 's over now,
And neither wrist — what men style, out of joint:
If any harm be, 't is the shoulder-blade,
The left one, that seems wrong i' the socket, — Sirs,
Much could not happen, I was quick to faint,
Being past my prime of life, and out of health.
In short, I thank you, — yes, and mean the word.
Needs must the Court be slow to understand
How this quite novel form of taking pain,
This getting tortured merely in the flesh,
Amounts to almost an agreeable change
In my case, me fastidious, plied too much
With opposite treatment, used (forgive the joke)
To the rasp-tooth toying with this brain of mine,
And, in and out my heart, the play o' the probe.
Four years have I been operated on
I' the soul, do you see — its tense or tremulous part —
My self-respect, my care for a good name,
Pride in an old one, love of kindred — just
A mother, brothers, sisters, and the like,
That looked up to my face when days were dim,
And fancied they found light there — no one spot,
Foppishly sensitive, but has paid its pang.
That, and not this you now oblige me with,
That was the Vigil-torment, if you please!
The poor old noble House that drew the rags
O' the Franceschini's once superb array
Close round her, hoped to slink unchallenged by, —
Pluck off these! Turn the drapery inside out
And teach the tittering town how scarlet wears!
Show men the lucklessness, the improvidence
Of the easy-natured Count before this Count,
The father I have some slight feeling for,
Who let the world slide, nor foresaw that friends

Then proud to cap and kiss their patron's shoe,
Would, when the purse he left held spider-webs,
Properly push his child to wall one day!
Mimic the tetchy humor, furtive glance,
And brow where half was furious, half fatigued,
O' the same son got to be of middle age,
Sour, saturnine, — your humble servant here, —
When things go cross and the young wife, he finds
Take to the window at a whistle's bid,
And yet demurs thereon, preposterous fool! —
Whereat the worthies judge he wants advice
And beg to civilly ask what 's evil here,
Perhaps remonstrate on the habit they deem
He 's given unduly to, of beating her:
. . . Oh, sure he beats her — why says John so else,
Who is cousin to George who is sib to Tecla's self
Who cooks the meal and combs the lady's hair?
What! 'T is my wrist you merely dislocate
For the future when you mean me martyrdom?
— Let the old mother's economy alone,
How the brocade-strips saved o' the seamy side
O' the wedding-gown buy raiment for a year?
— How she can dress and dish up — lordly dish
Fit for a duke, lamb's head and purtenance —
With her proud hands, feast household so a week?
No word o' the wine rejoicing God and man
The less when three-parts water? Then, I say,
A trifle of torture to the flesh, like yours,
While soul is spared such foretaste of hell-fire,
Is naught. But I curtail the catalogue
Through policy, — a rhetorician's trick, —
Because I would reserve some choicer points
O' the practice, more exactly parallel
(Having an eye to climax) with what gift,

Eventual grace the Court may have in store
I' the way of plague — what crown of punishments.
When I am hanged or headed, time enough
To prove the tenderness of only that,
Mere heading, hanging, — not their counterpart,
Not demonstration public and precise
That I, having married the mongrel of a drab,
Am bound to grant that mongrel-brat, my wife,
Her mother's birthright-license as is just, —
Let her sleep undisturbed, i' the family style,
Her sleep out in the embraces of a priest,
Nor disallow their bastard as my heir !
Your sole mistake, — dare I submit so much
To the reverend Court ? — has been in all this pains
To make a stone roll down hill, — rack and wrench
And rend a man to pieces, all for what ?
Why — make him ope mouth in his own defence,
Show cause for what he has done, the irregular deed,
(Since that he did it, scarce dispute can be)
And clear his fame a little, beside the luck
Of stopping even yet, if possible,
Discomfort to his flesh from noose or axe —
For that, out come the implements of law !
May it content my lords the gracious Court
To listen only half so patient-long
As I will in that sense profusely speak,
And — fie, they shall not call in screws to help !
I killed Pompilia Franceschini, Sirs ;
Killed too the Comparini, husband, wife,
Who called themselves, by a notorious lie,
Her father and her mother to ruin me.
There 's the irregular deed : you want no more
Than right interpretation of the same,
And truth so far — am I to understand ?

To that then, with convenient speed, — because
Now I consider, — yes, despite my boast,
There is an ailing in this omoplat
May clip my speech all too abruptly short,
Whatever the good-will in me. Now for truth !

I' the name of the indivisible Trinity !
Will my lords, in the plenitude of their light,
Weigh well that all this trouble has come on me
Through my persistent treading in the paths
Where I was trained to go, — wearing that yoke
My shoulder was predestined to receive,
Born to the hereditary stoop and crease ?
Noble, I recognized my nobler still,
The Church, my suzerain ; no mock-mistress, she ;
The secular owned the spiritual : mates of mine
Have thrown their careless hoofs up at her call
" Forsake the clover and come drag my wain ! "
There they go cropping : I protruded nose
To halter, bent my back of docile beast,
And now am whealed, one wide wound all of me,
For being found at the eleventh hour o' the day
Padding the mill-track, not neck-deep in grass :
— My one fault, I am stiffened by my work,
— My one reward, I help the Court to smile !

I am representative of a great line,
One of the first of the old families
In Arezzo, ancientest of Tuscan towns.
When my worst foe is fain to challenge this,
His worst exception runs — not first in rank
But second, noble in the next degree
Only ; not malice' self maligns me more.
So, my lord opposite has composed, we know,

A marvel of a book, sustains the point
That Francis boasts the primacy 'mid saints;
Yet not inaptly hath his argument
Obtained response from yon my other lord
In thesis published with the world's applause
— Rather 'tis Dominic such post befits:
Why, at the worst, Francis stays Francis still,
Second in rank to Dominic it may be,
Still, very saintly, very like our Lord;
And I at least descend from Guido once
Homager to the Empire, naught below —
Of which account as proof that, none o' the line
Having a single gift beyond brave blood,
Or able to do ought but give, give, give
In blood and brain, in house and land and cash,
Not get and garner as the vulgar may,
We became poor as Francis or our Lord.
Be that as it likes you, Sirs, — whenever it chanced
Myself grew capable anyway of remark,
(Which was soon — penury makes wit premature)
This struck me, I was poor who should be rich
Or pay that fault to the world which trifles not
When lineage lacks the flag yet lifts the pole:
On, therefore, I must move forthwith, transfer
My stranded self, born fish with gill and fin
Fit for the deep sea, now left flap bare-backed
In slush and sand, a show to crawlers vile
Reared of the low-tide and aright therein.
The enviable youth with the old name,
Wide chest, stout arms, sound brow and pricking veins,
A heartful of desire, man's natural load,
A brainful of belief, the noble's lot, —
All this life, cramped and gasping, high and dry
I' the wave's retreat, — the misery, good my lords,

Which made you merriment at Rome of late, —
It made me reason, rather — muse, demand
— Why our bare dropping palace, in the street
Where such-an-one whose grandfather sold tripe
Was adding to his purchased pile a fourth
Tall tower, could hardly show a turret sound?
Why Countess Beatrice, whose son I am,
Cowered in the winter-time as she spun flax,
Blew on the earthen basket of live ash,
Instead of jaunting forth in coach and six
Like such-another widow who ne'er was wed?
I asked my fellows, how came this about?
"Why, Jack, the suttler's child, perhaps the camp's,
Went to the wars, fought sturdily, took a town
And got rewarded as was natural.
She of the coach and six — excuse me there!
Why, don't you know the story of her friend?
A clown dressed vines on somebody's estate,
His boy recoiled from muck, liked Latin more,
Stuck to his pen and got to be a priest,
Till one day . . . don't you mind that telling tract
Against Molinos, the old Cardinal wrote?
He penned and dropped it in the patron's desk
Who, deep in thought and absent much of mind,
Licensed the thing, allowed it for his own;
Quick came promotion, — *suum cuique*, Count!
Oh, he can pay for coach and six, be sure!"
"— Well, let me go, do likewise: war 's the word —
That way the Franceschini worked at first,
I 'll take my turn, try soldiership." — "What, you?
The eldest son and heir and prop o' the house,
So do you see your duty? Here 's your post,
Hard by the hearth and altar. (Roam from roof,
This youngster, play the gipsy out of doors,

And who keeps kith and kin that fall on us?)
Stand fast, stick tight, conserve your gods at home!"
"— Well then, the quiet course, the contrary trade!
We had a cousin amongst us once was Pope,
And minor glories manifold. Try the Church,
The tonsure, and, — since heresy's but half-slain
Even by the Cardinal's tract he thought he wrote, —
Have at Molinos!" — "Have at a fool's head!
You a priest? How were marriage possible?
There must be Franceschini till time ends —
That's your vocation. Make your brothers priests,
Paul shall be porporate, and Girolamo step
Red-stockinged in the presence when you choose,
But save one Franceschini for the age!
Be not the vine but dig and dung its root,
Be not a priest but gird up priesthood's loins,
With one foot in Arezzo stride to Rome,
Spend yourself there and bring the purchase back!
Go hence to Rome, be guided!"

So I was.
I turned alike from the hill-side zig-zag thread
Of way to the table-land a soldier takes,
Alike from the low-lying pasture-place
Where churchmen graze, recline and ruminate,
— Ventured to mount no platform like my lords
Who judge the world, bear brain I dare not brag —
But stationed me, might thus the expression serve,
As who should fetch and carry, come and go,
Meddle and make i' the cause my lords love most —
The public weal, which hangs to the law, which holds
By the Church, which happens to be through God himself.
Humbly I helped the Church till here I stand, —

Or would stand but for the omoplat, you see!
Bidden qualify for Rome, I, having a field,
Went, sold it, laid the sum at Peter's foot:
Which means — I settled home-accounts with speed,
Set apart just a modicum should suffice
To hold the villa's head above the waves
Of weed inundating its oil and wine,
And prop roof, stanchion wall o' the palace so
As to keep breath i' the body, out of heart
Amid the advance of neighboring loftiness —
(People like building where they used to beg) —
Till succored one day, — shared the residue
Between my mother and brothers and sisters there,
Black-eyed babe Donna This and Donna That,
As near to starving as might decently be.
— Left myself journey-charges, change of suit,
A purse to put i' the pocket of the Groom
O' the Chamber of the patron, and a glove
With a ring to it for the digits of the niece
Sure to be helpful in his household, — then
Started for Rome, and led the life prescribed.
Close to the Church, though clean of it, I assumed
Three or four orders of no consequence,
— They cast out evil spirits and exorcise,
For example; bind a man to nothing more,
Give clerical savor to his layman's-salt,
Facilitate his claim to loaf and fish
Should miracle leave, beyond what feeds the flock,
Fragments to brim the basket of a friend —
While, for the world's sake, I rode, danced and gamed,
Quitted me like a courtier, measured mine
With whatsoever blade had fame in fence,
— Ready to let the basket go its round
Even though my turn was come to help myself,

Should Dives count on me at dinner-time
As just the understander of a joke
And not immoderate in repartee.
Utrique sic paratus, Sirs, I said,
"Here," (in the fortitude of years fifteen,
So good a pedagogue is penury)
"Here wait, do service, — serving and to serve!
And, in due time, I nowise doubt at all,
The recognition of my service comes.
Next year I 'm only sixteen. I can wait."

I waited thirty years, may it please the Court:
Saw meanwhile many a denizen o' the dung
Hop, skip, jump o'er my shoulder, make him wings
And fly aloft, — succeed, in the usual phrase.
Everyone soon or late comes round by Rome:
Stand still here, you 'll see all in turn succeed.
Why, look you, so and so, the physician here,
My father's lacquey's son we sent to school,
Doctored and dosed this Eminence and that,
Salved the last Pope his certain obstinate sore,
Soon bought land as became him, names it now:
I grasp bell at his griffin-guarded gate,
Traverse the half-mile avenue, — a term,
A cypress, and a statue, three and three, —
Deliver message from my Monsignor,
With varletry at lounge i' the vestibule
I 'm barred from who bear mud upon my shoe.
My father's chaplain's nephew, Chamberlain, —
Nothing less, please you! — courteous all the same,
— He does not see me though I wait an hour
At his staircase-landing 'twixt the brace of busts,
A noseless Sylla, Marius maimed to match,
My father gave him for a hexastich

Made on my birthday, — but he sends me down,
To make amends, that relic I prize most —
The unburnt end o' the very candle, Sirs,
Purfled with paint so prettily round and round,
He carried in such state last Peter's-day, —
In token I, his gentleman and squire,
Had held the bridle, walked his managed mule
Without a tittup the procession through.
Nay, the official, — one you know, sweet lords! —
Who drew the warrant for my transfer late
To the New Prisons from Tordinona, — he
Graciously had remembrance — "Francesc . . . ha?
His sire, now — how a thing shall come about! —
Paid me a dozen florins above the fee,
For drawing deftly up a deed of sale
When troubles fell so thick on him, good heart,
And I was prompt and pushing! By all means!
At the New Prisons be it his son shall lie, —
Anything for an old friend!" and thereat
Signed name with triple flourish underneath.
These were my fellows, such their fortunes now,
While I — kept fasts and feasts innumerable,
Matins and vespers, functions to no end
I' the train of Monsignor and Eminence,
As gentleman-squire, and for my zeal's reward
Have rarely missed a place at the table-foot
Except when some Ambassador, or such like,
Brought his own people. Brief, one day I felt
The tick of time inside me, turning-point
And slight sense there was now enough of this:
That I was near my seventh climacteric,
Hard upon, if not over, the middle life,
And although fed by the east-wind, fulsome-fine
With foretaste of the Land of Promise, still

My gorge gave symptom it might play me false;
Better not press it further, — be content
With living and dying only a nobleman,
Who merely had a father great and rich,
Who simply had one greater and richer yet,
And so on back and back till first and best
Began i' the night; I finish in the day.
"The mother must be getting old," I said;
"The sisters are well wedded away, our name
Can manage to pass a sister off, at need,
And do for dowry: both my brothers thrive —
Regular priests they are, nor, bat-like, 'bide
'Twixt flesh and fowl with neither privilege.
My spare revenue must keep me and mine.
I am tired: Arezzo's air is good to breathe;
Vittiano, — one limes flocks of thrushes there;
A leathern coat costs little and lasts long:
Let me bid hope good-bye, content at home!"
Thus, one day, I disbosomed me and bowed.
Whereat began the little buzz and thrill
O' the gazers round me; each face brightened up:
As when at your Casino, deep in dawn,
A gamester says at last, "I play no more,
Forego gain, acquiesce in loss, withdraw
Anyhow:" and the watchers of his ways,
A trifle struck compunctious at the word,
Yet sensible of relief, breathe free once more,
Break up the ring, venture polite advice —
"How, Sir? So scant of heart and hope indeed?
Retire with neither cross nor pile from play? —
So incurious, so short-casting? — give your chance
To a younger, stronger, bolder spirit belike,
Just when luck turns and the fine throw sweeps all?"
Such was the chorus: and its good-will meant —

"See that the loser leave door handsomely!
There 's an ill look, — it 's sinister, spoils sport,
When an old bruised and battered year-by-year
Fighter with fortune, not a penny in poke,
Reels down the steps of our establishment
And staggers on broad daylight and the world,
In shagrag beard and doleful doublet, drops
And breaks his heart on the outside: people prate
'Such is the profit of a trip upstairs!'
Contrive he sidle forth, balked of the blow
Best dealt by way of moral, bidding down
No curse but blessings rather on our heads
For some poor prize he bears at tattered breast,
Some palpable sort of kind of good to set
Over and against the grievance: give him quick!"
Whereon protested Paul, "Go hang yourselves!
Leave him to me. Count Guido and brother of mine,
A word in your ear! Take courage, since faint heart
Ne'er won . . . aha, fair lady, don't men say? 400
There 's a *sors*, there 's a right Virgilian dip!
Do you see the happiness o' the hint? At worst,
If the Church want no more of you, the Court
No more, and the Camp as little, the ingrates, — come,
Count you are counted: still you 've coat to back,
Not cloth of gold and tissue, as we hoped,
But cloth with sparks and spangles on its frieze
From Camp, Court, Church, enough to make a shine,
Entitle you to carry home a wife
With the proper dowry, let the worst betide! 410
Why, it was just a wife you meant to take!"

Now, Paul's advice was weighty: priests should know:
And Paul apprised me, ere the week was out,
That Pietro and Violante, the easy pair,

The cits enough, with stomach to be more,
Had just the daughter and exact the sum
To truck for the quality of myself: "She 's young,
Pretty and rich: you 're noble, classic, choice.
Is it to be a match?" "A match," said I.
Done! He proposed all, I accepted all,
And we performed all. So I said and did
Simply. As simply followed, not at first
But with the outbreak of misfortune, still
One comment on the saying and doing — "What?
No blush at the avowal you dared buy
A girl of age beseems your granddaughter,
Like ox or ass? Are flesh and blood a ware?
Are heart and soul a chattel?"
Softly, Sirs!
Will the Court of its charity teach poor me
Anxious to learn, of any way i' the world,
Allowed by custom and convenience, save
This same which, taught from my youth up, I trod?
Take me along with you; where was the wrong step?
If what I gave in barter, style and state
And all that hangs to Franceschinihood,
Were worthless, — why, society goes to ground,
Its rules are idiot's-rambling. Honor of birth, —
If that thing has no value, cannot buy
Something with value of another sort,
You 've no reward nor punishment to give
I' the giving or the taking honor; straight
Your social fabric, pinnacle to base,
Comes down a-clatter like a house of cards.
Get honor, and keep honor free from flaw,
Aim at still higher honor, — gabble o' the goose!
Go bid a second blockhead like myself
Spend fifty years in guarding bubbles of breath,

Soapsuds with air i' the belly, gilded brave,
Guarded and guided, all to break at touch
O' the first young girl's hand and first old fool's purse!
All my privation and endurance, all
Love, loyalty and labor dared and did,
Fiddle-de-dee! — why, doer and darer both, —
Count Guido Franceschini had hit the mark
Far better, spent his life with more effect,
As a dancer or a prizer, trades that pay!
On the other hand, bid this buffoonery cease,
Admit that honor is a privilege,
The question follows, privilege worth what?
Why, worth the market-price, — now up, now down,
Just so with this as with all other ware:
Therefore essay the market, sell your name,
Style and condition to who buys them best!
"Does my name purchase," had I dared inquire,
"Your niece, my lord?" there would have been rebuff
Though courtesy, your Lordship cannot else
"Not altogether! Rank for rank may stand:
But I have wealth beside, you — poverty;
Your scale flies up there: bid a second bid
Rank too and wealth too!" Reasoned like yourself!
But was it to you I went with goods to sell?
This time 't was my scale quietly kissed the ground,
Mere rank against mere wealth — some youth beside,
Some beauty too, thrown into the bargain, just
As the buyer likes or lets alone. I thought
To deal o' the square: others find fault, it seems:
The thing is, those my offer most concerned,
Pietro, Violante, cried they fair or foul?
What did they make o' the terms? Preposterous terms?
Why then accede so promptly, close with such

Nor take a minute to chaffer? Bargain struck,
They straight grew bilious, wished their money back,
Repented them, no doubt: why, so did I,
So did your Lordship, if town-talk be true,
Of paying a full farm's worth for that piece
By Pietro of Cortona — probably
His scholar Ciro Ferri may have retouched —
You caring more for color than design —
Getting a little tired of cupids too.
That 's incident to all the folk who buy!
I am charged, I know, with gilding fact by fraud;
I falsified and fabricated, wrote
Myself down roughly richer than I prove,
Rendered a wrong revenue, — grant it all!
Mere grace, mere coquetry such fraud, I say:
A flourish round the figures of a sum
For fashion's sake, that deceives nobody.
The veritable backbone, understood
Essence of this same bargain, blank and bare,
Being the exchange of quality for wealth, —
What may such fancy-flights be? Flecks of oil
Flirted by chapmen where plain dealing grates.
I may have dripped a drop — "My name I sell;
Not but that I too boast my wealth" — as they,
"— We bring you riches; still our ancestor
Was hardly the rapscallion folk saw flogged,
But heir to we know who, were rights of force!"
They knew and I knew where the backbone lurked
I' the writhings of the bargain, lords, believe!
I paid down all engaged for, to a doit,
Delivered them just that which, their life long,
They hungered in the hearts of them to gain —
Incorporation with nobility thus
In word and deed: for that they gave me wealth.

But when they came to try their gain, my gift,
Quit Rome and qualify for Arezzo, take
The tone o' the new sphere that absorbed the old,
Put away gossip Jack and goody Joan
And go become familiar with the Great,
Greatness to touch and taste and handle now, — 520
Why then, — they found that all was vanity,
Vexation, and what Solomon describes!
The old abundant city-fare was best,
The kindly warmth o' the commons, the glad clap
Of the equal on the shoulder, the frank grin
Of the underling at all so many spoons
Fire-new at neighborly treat, — best, best and best
Beyond compare! — down to the loll itself
O' the pot-house settle, — better such a bench
Than the stiff crucifixion by my dais 530
Under the piecemeal damask canopy
With the coroneted coat of arms a-top!
Poverty and privation for pride's sake,
All they engaged to easily brave and bear, —
With the fit upon them and their brains a-work, —
Proved unendurable to the sobered sots.
A banished prince, now, will exude a juice
And salamander-like support the flame:
He dines on chestnuts, chucks the husks to help
The broil o' the brazier, pays the due baioc, 540
Goes off light-hearted: his grimace begins
At the funny humors of the christening-feast
Of friend the money-lender, — then he 's touched
By the flame and frizzles at the babe to kiss!
Here was the converse trial, opposite mind:
Here did a petty nature split on rock
Of vulgar wants predestinate for such —
One dish at supper and weak wine to boot!

The prince had grinned and borne : the citizen shrieked,
Summoned the neighborhood to attest the wrong,
Made noisy protest he was murdered, — stoned
And burned and drowned and hanged, — then broke away,
He and his wife, to tell their Rome the rest.
And this you admire, you men o' the world, my lords?
This moves compassion, makes you doubt my faith?
Why, I appeal to . . . sun and moon ` Not I!
Rather to Plautus, Terence, Boccaccio's Book,
My townsman, frank Ser Franco's merry Tales, —
To all who strip a vizard from a face,
A body from its padding, and a soul
From froth and ignorance it styles itself, —
If this be other than the daily hap
Of purblind greed that dog-like still drops bone,
Grasps shadow, and then howls the case is hard!

So much for them so far: now for myself,
My profit or loss i' the matter: married am I:
Text whereon friendly censors burst to preach.
Ay, at Rome even, long ere I was left
To regulate her life for my young bride
Alone at Arezzo, friendliness outbroke
(Sifting my future to predict its fault)
" Purchase and sale being thus so plain a point,
How of a certain soul bound up, may-be,
I' the barter with the body and money-bags?
From the bride's soul what is it you expect? "
Why, loyalty and obedience, — wish and will
To settle and suit her fresh and plastic mind
To the novel, not disadvantageous mould!
Father and mother shall the woman leave,
Cleave to the husband, be it for weal or woe:

There is the law: what sets this law aside
In my particular case? My friends submit
"Guide, guardian, benefactor, — fee, faw, fum,
The fact is you are forty-five years old,
Nor very comely even for that age:
Girls must have boys." Why, let girls say so then,
Nor call the boys and men, who say the same,
Brute this and beast the other as they do!
Come, cards on table! When you chaunt us next
Epithalamium full to overflow
With praise and glory of white womanhood,
The chaste and pure — troll no such lies o'er lip!
Put in their stead a crudity or two,
Such short and simple statement of the case
As youth chalks on our walls at spring of year!
No! I shall still think nobler of the sex,
Believe a woman still may take a man
For the short period that his soul wears flesh,
And, for the soul's sake, understand the fault
Of armor frayed by fighting. Tush, it tempts
One's tongue too much! I 'll say — the law 's the law:
With a wife I look to find all wifeliness,
As when I buy, timber and twig, a tree —
I buy the song o' the nightingale inside.

Such was the pact: Pompilia from the first
Broke it, refused from the beginning day
Either in body or soul to cleave to mine,
And published it forthwith to all the world.
No rupture, — you must join ere you can break, —
Before we had cohabited a month
She found I was a devil and no man, —
Made common cause with those who found as much,
Her parents, Pietro and Violante, — moved

Heaven and earth to the rescue of all three.
In four months' time, the time o' the parents' stay,
Arezzo was a-ringing, bells in a blaze,
With the unimaginable story rife
I' the mouth of man, woman and child — to-wit
My misdemeanor. First the lighter side,
Ludicrous face of things, — how very poor
The Franceschini had become at last,
The meanness and the misery of each shift
To save a soldo, stretch and make ends meet.
Next, the more hateful aspect, — how myself
With cruelty beyond Caligula's
Had stripped and beaten, robbed and murdered them,
The good old couple, I decoyed, abused,
Plundered and then cast out, and happily so,
Since, — in due course the abominable comes, —
Woe worth the poor young wife left lonely here!
Repugnant in my person as my mind,
I sought, — was ever heard of such revenge?
— To lure and bind her to so cursed a couch,
Such co-embrace with sulphur, snake and toad,
That she was fain to rush forth, call the stones
O' the common street to save her, not from hate
Of mine merely, but . . . must I burn my lips
With the blister of the lie? . . . the satyr-love
Of whom but my own brother, the young priest,
Too long enforced to lenten fare belike,
Now tempted by the morsel tossed him full
I' the trencher where lay bread and herbs at best.
Mark, this yourselves say! — this, none disallows,
Was charged to me by the universal voice
At the instigation of my four-months' wife! —
And then you ask "Such charges so preferred,
(Truly or falsely, here concerns us not)

Pricked you to punish now if not before? —
Did not the harshness double itself, the hate
Harden?" I answer "Have it your way and will!"
Say my resentment grew apace: what then?
Do you cry out on the marvel? When I find
That pure smooth egg which, laid within my nest,
Could not but hatch a comfort to us all,
Issues a cockatrice for me and mine,
Do you stare to see me stamp on it? Swans are soft:
Is it not clear that she you call my wife,
That any wife of any husband, caught
Whetting a sting like this against his breast, —
Speckled with fragments of the fresh-broke shell,
Married a month and making outcry thus, —
Proves a plague-prodigy to God and man?
She married: what was it she married for,
Counted upon and meant to meet thereby?
"Love" suggests some one, "love, a little word
Whereof we have not heard one syllable."
So, the Pompilia, child, girl, wife, in one,
Wanted the beating pulse, the rolling eye,
The frantic gesture, the devotion due
From Thyrsis to Neæra! Guido's love —
Why not Provençal roses in his shoe,
Plume to his cap, and trio of guitars
At casement, with a bravo close beside?
Good things all these are, clearly claimable
When the fit price is paid the proper way.
Had it been some friend's wife, now, threw her fan
At my foot, with just this pretty scrap attached,
"Shame, death, damnation — fall these as they may,
So I find you, for a minute! Come this eve!"
— Why, at such sweet self-sacrifice, — who knows?
I might have fired up, found me at my post,

Ardent from head to heel, nor feared catch cough.
Nay, had some other friend's . . . say, daughter, tripped
Upstairs and tumbled flat and frank on me,
Bareheaded and barefooted, with loose hair
And garments all at large, — cried "Take me thus!
Duke So-and-So, the greatest man in Rome —
To escape his hand and heart have I broke bounds,
Traversed the town and reached you!" — then, indeed,
The lady had not reached a man of ice!
I would have rummaged, ransacked at the word
Those old odd corners of an empty heart
For remnants of dim love the long disused,
And dusty crumblings of romance! But here,
We talk of just a marriage, if you please —
The every-day conditions and no more;
Where do these bind me to bestow one drop
Of blood shall dye my wife's true-love-knot pink?
Pompilia was no pigeon, Venus' pet,
That shuffled from between her pressing paps
To sit on my rough shoulder, — but a hawk,
I bought at a hawk's price and carried home
To do hawk's service — at the Rotunda, say,
Where, six o' the callow nestlings in a row,
You pick and choose and pay the price for such.
I have paid my pound, await my penny's worth,
So, hoodwink, starve and properly train my bird,
And, should she prove a haggard, — twist her neck!
Did I not pay my name and style, my hope
And trust, my all? Through spending these amiss
I am here! 'T is scarce the gravity of the Court
Will blame me that I never piped a tune,
Treated my falcon-gentle like my finch.
The obligation I incurred was just
To practise mastery, prove my mastership: —

Pompilia's duty was — submit herself,
Afford me pleasure, perhaps cure my bile.
Am I to teach my lords what marriage means,
What God ordains thereby and man fulfils
Who, docile to the dictate, treads the house?
My lords have chosen the happier part with Paul
And neither marry nor burn, — yet priestliness
Can find a parallel to the marriage-bond
In its own blessed special ordinance
Whereof indeed was marriage made the type:
The Church may show her insubordinate,
As marriage her refractory. How of the Monk
Who finds the claustral regimen too sharp
After the first month's essay? What 's the mode
With the Deacon who supports indifferently
The rod o' the Bishop when he tastes its smart
Full four weeks? Do you straightway slacken hold
Of the innocents, the all-unwary ones
Who, eager to profess, mistook their mind? —
Remit a fast-day's rigor to the Monk
Who fancied Francis' manna meant roast quails, —
Concede the Deacon sweet society,
He never thought the Levite-rule renounced, —
Or rather prescribe short chain and sharp scourge
Corrective of such peccant humors? This —
I take to be the Church's mode, and mine.
If I was over-harsh, — the worse i' the wife
Who did not win from harshness as she ought,
Wanted the patience and persuasion, lore
Of love, should cure me and console herself.
Put case that I mishandle, flurry and fright
My hawk through clumsiness in sportsmanship,
Twitch out five pens where plucking one would serve —
What, shall she bite and claw to mend the case?

And, if you find I pluck five more for that,
Shall you weep "How he roughs the turtle there"?

Such was the starting; now of the further step.
In lieu of taking penance in good part,
The Monk, with hue and cry, summons a mob
To make a bonfire of the convent, say, —
And the Deacon's pretty piece of virtue (save
The ears o' the Court! I try to save my head)
Instructed by the ingenuous postulant,
Taxes the Bishop with adultery, (mud
Needs must pair off with mud, and filth with filth) —
Such being my next experience. Who knows not —
The couple, father and mother of my wife,
Returned to Rome, published before my lords,
Put into print, made circulate far and wide
That they had cheated me who cheated them?
Pompilia, I supposed their daughter, drew
Breath first 'mid Rome's worst rankness, through the deed
Of a drab and a rogue, was by-blow bastard-babe
Of a nameless strumpet, passed off, palmed on me
As the daughter with the dowry. Daughter? Dirt
O' the kennel! Dowry? Dust o' the street! Naught more,
Naught less, naught else but — oh — ah — assuredly
A Franceschini and my very wife!
Now take this charge as you will, for false or true, —
This charge, preferred before your very selves
Who judge me now, — I pray you, adjudge again,
Classing it with the cheats or with the lies,
By which category I suffer most!
But of their reckoning, theirs who dealt with me
In either fashion, — I reserve my word,

Justify that in its place ; I am now to say,
Whichever point o' the charge might poison most,
Pompilia's duty was no doubtful one.
You put the protestation in her mouth
" Henceforward and forevermore, avaunt
Ye fiends, who drop disguise and glare revealed
In your own shape, no longer father mine
Nor mother mine ! Too nakedly you hate
Me whom you looked as if you loved once, — me
Whom, whether true or false, your tale now damns,
Divulged thus to my public infamy,
Private perdition, absolute overthrow.
For, hate my husband to your hearts' content,
I, spoil and prey of you from first to last,
I who have done you the blind service, lured
The lion to your pitfall, — I, thus left
To answer for my ignorant bleating there,
I should have been remembered and withdrawn
From the first o' the natural fury, not flung loose
A proverb and a by-word men will mouth
At the cross-way, in the corner, up and down
Rome and Arezzo, — there, full in my face,
If my lord, missing them and finding me,
Content himself with casting his reproach
To drop i' the street where such impostors die.
Ah, but — that husband, what the wonder were ! —
If, far from casting thus away the rag
Smeared with the plague his hand had chanced upon,
Sewn to his pillow by Locusta's wile, —
Far from abolishing, root, stem and branch,
The misgrowth of infectious mistletoe
Foisted into his stock for honest graft, —
If he repudiate not, renounce nowise,
But, guarding, guiding me, maintain my cause

By making it his own, (what other way?)
— To keep my name for me, he call it his,
Claim it of who would take it by their lie, —
To save my wealth for me — or babe of mine
Their lie was framed to beggar at the birth —
He bid them loose grasp, give our gold again:
If he become no partner with the pair
Even in a game which, played adroitly, gives
Its winner life's great wonderful new chance, —
Of marrying, to-wit, a second time, —
Ah, if he did thus, what a friend were he!
Anger he might show, — who can stamp out flame
Yet spread no black o' the brand? — yet, rough albeit
In the act, as whose bare feet feel embers scorch,
What grace were his, what gratitude were mine!"
Such protestation should have been my wife's.
Looking for this, do I exact too much?
Why, here 's the,—word for word, so much, no more,—
Avowal she made, her pure spontaneous speech
To my brother the Abate at first blush,
Ere the good impulse had begun to fade:
So did she make confession for the pair,
So pour forth praises in her own behalf.
"Ay, the false letter," interpose my lords —
"The simulated writing, — 't was a trick:
You traced the signs, she merely marked the same,
The product was not hers but yours." Alack,
I want no more impulsion to tell truth
From the other trick, the torture inside there!
I confess all — let it be understood —
And deny nothing! If I baffle you so,
Can so fence, in the plenitude of right,
That my poor lathen dagger puts aside
Each pass o' the Bilboa, beats you all the same, —

What matters inefficiency of blade?
Mine and not hers the letter, — conceded, lords!
Impute to me that practice! — take as proved
I taught my wife her duty, made her see
What it behoved her see and say and do,
Feel in her heart and with her tongue declare,
And, whether sluggish or recalcitrant,
Forced her to take the right step, I myself
Was marching in marital rectitude!
Why who finds fault here, say the tale be true?
Would not my lords commend the priest whose zeal
Seized on the sick, morose or moribund,
By the palsy-smitten finger, made it cross
His brow correctly at the critical time?
— Or answered for the inarticulate babe
At baptism, in its stead declared the faith,
And saved what else would perish unprofessed?
True, the incapable hand may rally yet,
Renounce the sign with renovated strength, —
The babe may grow up man and Molinist, —
And so Pompilia, set in the good path
And left to go alone there, soon might see
That too frank-forward, all too simple-straight
Her step was, and decline to tread the rough,
When here lay, tempting foot, the meadow-side,
And there the coppice rang with singing-birds!
Soon she discovered she was young and fair,
That many in Arezzo knew as much.
Yes, this next cup of bitterness, my lords,
Had to begin go filling, drop by drop,
Its measure up of full disgust for me,
Filtered into by every noisome drain —
Society's sink toward which all moisture runs.
Would not you prophesy — "She on whose brow is stamped

The note of the imputation that we know, —
Rightly or wrongly mothered with a whore, —
Such an one, to disprove the frightful charge,
What will she but exaggerate chastity,
Err in excess of wifehood, as it were,
Renounce even levities permitted youth,
Though not youth struck to age by a thunderbolt? 889
Cry 'wolf' i' the sheepfold, where's the sheep dares bleat,
Knowing the shepherd listens for a growl?"
So you expect. How did the devil decree?
Why, my lords, just the contrary of course!
It was in the house from the window, at the church
From the hassock, — where the theatre lent its lodge,
Or staging for the public show left space, —
That still Pompilia needs must find herself
Launching her looks forth, letting looks reply
As arrows to a challenge; on all sides
Ever new contribution to her lap, 900
Till one day, what is it knocks at my clenched teeth
But the cup full, curse-collected all for me?
And I must needs drink, drink this gallant's praise,
That minion's prayer, the other fop's reproach,
And come at the dregs to — Caponsacchi! Sirs,
I, — chin-deep in a marsh of misery,
Struggling to extricate my name and fame
And fortune from the marsh would drown them all,
My face the sole unstrangled part of me, —
I must have this new gad-fly in that face, 910
Must free me from the attacking lover too!
Men say I battled ungracefully enough —
Was harsh, uncouth and ludicrous beyond
The proper part o' the husband: have it so!
Your lordships are considerate at least —
You order me to speak in my defence

Plainly, expect no quavering tuneful trills
As when you bid a singer solace you, —
Nor look that I shall give it, for a grace,
Stans pede in uno: — you remember well
In the one case, 't is a plainsong too severe,
This story of my wrongs, — and that I ache
And need a chair, in the other. Ask you me
Why, when I felt this trouble flap my face,
Already pricked with every shame could perch, —
When, with her parents, my wife plagued me too, —
Why I enforced not exhortation mild
To leave whore's-tricks and let my brows alone,
With mulct of comfits, promise of perfume?

"Far from that! No, you took the opposite course,
Breathed threatenings, rage and slaughter!" What you will!
And the end has come, the doom is verily here,
Unhindered by the threatening. See fate's flare
Full on each face of the dead guilty three!
Look at them well, and now, lords, look at this!
Tell me: if on that day when I found first
That Caponsacchi thought the nearest way
To his church was some half-mile round by my door,
And that he so admired, shall I suppose,
The manner of the swallows' come-and-go
Between the props o' the window over-head, —
That window happening to be my wife's, —
As to stand gazing by the hour on high,
Of May-eves, while she sat and let him smile, —
If I, — instead of threatening, talking big,
Showing hair-powder, a prodigious pinch,
For poison in a bottle, — making believe
At desperate doings with a bauble-sword,

And other bugaboo-and-baby-work, —
Had, with the vulgarest household implement,
Calmly and quietly cut off, clean thro' bone
But one joint of one finger of my wife,
Saying "For listening to the serenade,
Here 's your ring-finger shorter a full third:
Be certain I will slice away next joint,
Next time that anybody underneath
Seems somehow to be sauntering as he hoped
A flower would eddy out of your hand to his
While you please fidget with the branch above
O' the rose-tree in the terrace!" — had I done so,
Why, there had followed a quick sharp scream, some pain,
Much calling for plaister, damage to the dress,
A somewhat sulky countenance next day,
Perhaps reproaches, — but reflections too!
I don't hear much of harm that Malchus did
After the incident of the ear, my lords!
Saint Peter took the efficacious way;
Malchus was sore but silenced for his life:
He did not hang himself i' the Potter's Field
Like Judas, who was trusted with the bag
And treated to sops after he proved a thief.
So, by this time, my true and obedient wife
Might have been telling beads with a gloved hand;
Awkward a little at pricking hearts and darts
On sampler possibly, but well otherwise:
Not where Rome shudders now to see her lie.
I give that for the course a wise man takes;
I took the other however, tried the fool's,
The lighter remedy, brandished rapier dread
With cork-ball at the tip, boxed Malchus' ear
Instead of severing the cartilage,
Called her a terrible nickname, and the like,

And there an end: and what was the end of that?
What was the good effect o' the gentle course?
Why, one night I went drowsily to bed,
Dropped asleep suddenly, not suddenly woke,
But did wake with rough rousing and loud cry,
To find noon in my face, a crowd in my room,
Fumes in my brain, fire in my throat, my wife
Gone God knows whither, — rifled vesture-chest,
And ransacked money-coffer. "What does it mean?"
The servants had been drugged too, stared and yawned
"It must be that our lady has eloped!"
— "Whither and with whom?" — "With whom
but the Canon's self?
One recognizes Caponsacchi there!" —
(By this time the admiring neighborhood
Joined chorus round me while I rubbed my eyes)
"'T is months since their intelligence began, —
A comedy the town was privy to, —
He wrote and she wrote, she spoke, he replied,
And going in and out your house last night
Was easy work for one . . . to be plain with you . . .
Accustomed to do both, at dusk and dawn
When you were absent, — at the villa, you know,
Where husbandry required the master-mind.
Did not you know? Why, we all knew, you see!"
And presently, bit by bit, the full and true
Particulars of the tale were volunteered
With all the breathless zeal of friendship — "Thus
Matters were managed: at the seventh hour of
night" . . .
— "Later, at daybreak" . . . "Caponsacchi came" . . .
— "While you and all your household slept like death,
Drugged as your supper was with drowsy stuff" . . .
— "And your own cousin Guillichini too —

Either or both entered your dwelling-place,
Plundered it at their pleasure, made prize of all,
Including your wife . . . " — " Oh, your wife led the way,
Out of doors, on to the gate . . . " — " But gates are shut,
In a decent town, to darkness and such deeds :
They climbed the wall — your lady must be lithe —
At the gap, the broken bit . . . " — " Torrione, true!
To escape the questioning guard at the proper gate,
Clemente, where at the inn, hard by, 'the Horse,'
Just outside, a calash in readiness
Took the two principals, all alone at last,
To gate San Spirito, which o'erlooks the road,
Leads to Perugia, Rome and liberty."
Bit by bit thus made-up mosaic-wise,
Flat lay my fortune, — tessellated floor,
Imperishable tracery devils should foot
And frolic it on, around my broken gods,
Over my desecrated hearth.
So much
For the terrible effect of threatening, Sirs!
Well, this way I was shaken wide awake,
Doctored and drenched, somewhat unpoisoned so.
Then, set on horseback and bid seek the lost,
I started alone, head of me, heart of me
Fire, and each limb as languid . . . ah, sweet lords,
Bethink you! — poison-torture, try persuade
The next refractory Molinist with that! . . .
Floundered thro' day and night, another day
And yet another night, and so at last,
As Lucifer kept falling to find hell,
Tumbled into the court-yard of an inn
At the end, and fell on whom I thought to find,

Even Caponsacchi, — what part once was priest,
Cast to the winds now with the cassock-rags.
In cape and sword a cavalier confessed,
There stood he chiding dilatory grooms,
Chafing that only horseflesh and no team
Of eagles would supply the last relay,
Whirl him along the league, the one post more
Between the couple and Rome and liberty.
'T was dawn, the couple were rested in a sort,
And though the lady, tired, — the tenderer sex, —
Still lingered in her chamber, — to adjust
The limp hair, look for any blush astray, —
She would descend in a twinkling, — "Have you out
The horses therefore!"
So did I find my wife.
Is the case complete? Do your eyes here see with mine?
Even the parties dared deny no one
Point out of all these points.
What follows next?
"Why, that then was the time," you interpose,
"Or then or never, while the fact was fresh,
To take the natural vengeance: there and thus
They and you, — somebody had stuck a sword
Beside you while he pushed you on your horse, —
'T was requisite to slay the couple, Count!"
Just so my friends say. "Kill!" they cry in a breath,
Who presently, when matters grow to a head
And I do kill the offending ones indeed, —
When crime of theirs, only surmised before,
Is patent, proved indisputably now, —
When remedy for wrong, untried at the time,
Which law professes shall not fail a friend,
Is thrice tried now, found threefold worse than null, —
When what might turn to transient shade, who knows?

Solidifies into a blot which breaks
Hell's black off in pale flakes for fear of mine, —
Then, when I claim and take revenge — "So rash?"
They cry — "so little reverence for the law?"

Listen, my masters, and distinguish here!
At first, I called in law to act and help:
Seeing I did so, "Why, 't is clear," they cry,
"You shrank from gallant readiness and risk,
Were coward: the thing's inexplicable else."
Sweet my lords, let the thing be! I fall flat,
Play the reed, not the oak, to breath of man.
Only inform my ignorance! Say I stand
Convicted of the having been afraid,
Proved a poltroon, no lion but a lamb, —
Does that deprive me of my right of lamb
And give my fleece and flesh to the first wolf?
Are eunuchs, women, children, shieldless quite
Against attack their own timidity tempts?
Cowardice were misfortune and no crime!
— Take it that way, since I am fallen so low
I scarce dare brush the fly that blows my face,
And thank the man who simply spits not there, —
Unless the Court be generous, comprehend
How one brought up at the very feet of law
As I, awaits the grave Gamaliel's nod
Ere he clench fist at outrage, — much less, stab!
— How, ready enough to rise at the right time,
I still could recognize no time mature
Unsanctioned by a move o' the judgment-seat,
So, mute in misery, eyed my masters here
Motionless till the authoritative word
Pronounced amercement. There 's the riddle solved:
This is just why I slew nor her nor him,

But called in law, law's delegate in the place,
And bade arrest the guilty couple, Sirs!
We had some trouble to do so — you have heard
They braved me, — he with arrogance and scorn,
She, with a volubility of curse,
A conversancy in the skill of tooth
And claw to make suspicion seem absurd,
Nay, an alacrity to put to proof
At my own throat my own sword, teach me so
To try conclusions better the next time, —
Which did the proper service with the mob.
They never tried to put on mask at all:
Two avowed lovers forcibly torn apart,
Upbraid the tyrant as in a playhouse scene,
Ay, and with proper clapping and applause
From the audience that enjoys the bold and free.
I kept still, said to myself, "There 's law!" Anon
We searched the chamber where they passed the night,
Found what confirmed the worst was feared before,
However needless confirmation now —
The witches' circle intact, charms undisturbed
That raised the spirit and succubus, — letters, to-wit,
Love-laden, each the bag o' the bee that bore
Honey from lily and rose to Cupid's hive, —
Now, poetry in some rank blossom-burst,
Now, prose, — "Come here, go there, wait such a while,
He 's at the villa, now he 's back again:
We are saved, we are lost, we are lovers all the same!"
All in order, all complete, — even to a clue
To the drowsiness that happed so opportune —
No mystery, when I read "Of all things, find
What wine Sir Jealousy decides to drink —
Red wine? Because a sleeping-potion, dust
Dropped into white, discolors wine and shows."

— "Oh, but we did not write a single word !
Somebody forged the letters in our name ! — "
Both in a breath protested presently.
Aha, Sacchetti again ! — "Dame," — quoth the Duke,
"What meaneth this epistle, counsel me,
I pick from out thy placket and peruse,
Wherein my page averreth thou art white
And warm and wonderful 'twixt pap and pap ?"
"Sir," laughed the Lady, "'t is a counterfeit !
Thy page did never stroke but Dian's breast,
The pretty hound I nurture for thy sake :
To lie were losel, — by my fay, no more !"
And no more say I too, and spare the Court.

Ah, the Court ! yes, I come to the Court's self ;
Such the case, so complete in fact and proof,
I laid at the feet of law, — there sat my lords,
Here sit they now, so may they ever sit
In easier attitude than suits my haunch !
In this same chamber did I bare my sores
O' the soul and not the body, — shun no shame,
Shrink from no probing of the ulcerous part,
Since confident in Nature, — which is God, —
That she who, for wise ends, concocts a plague,
Curbs, at the right time, the plague's virulence too :
Law renovates even Lazarus, — cures me !
Cæsar thou seekest ? To Cæsar thou shalt go !
Cæsar 's at Rome : to Rome accordingly !

The case was soon decided : both weights, cast
I' the balance, vibrate, neither kicks the beam,
Here away, there away, this now and now that.
To every one o' my grievances law gave
Redress, could purblind eye but see the point.

The wife stood a convicted runagate
From house and husband, — driven to such a course
By what she somehow took for cruelty,
Oppression and imperilment of life —
Not that such things were, but that so they seemed:
Therefore, the end conceded lawful, (since
To save life there 's no risk should stay our leap)
It follows that all means to the lawful end
Are lawful likewise, — poison, theft and flight.
As for the priest's part, did he meddle or make,
Enough that he too thought life jeopardized;
Concede him then the color charity
Casts on a doubtful course, — if blackish white
Or whitish black, will charity hesitate?
What did he else but act the precept out,
Leave, like a provident shepherd, his safe flock
To follow the single lamb and strayaway?
Best hope so and think so, — that the ticklish time
I' the carriage, the tempting privacy, the last
Somewhat ambiguous accident at the inn,
— All may bear explanation: may? then, must!
The letters, — do they so incriminate?
But what if the whole prove a prank o' the pen,
Flight of the fancy, none of theirs at all,
Bred of the vapors of my brain belike,
Or at worst mere exercise of scholar's-wit
In the courtly Caponsacchi: verse, convict?
Did not Catullus write less seemly once?
Yet *doctus* and unblemished he abides.
Wherefore so ready to infer the worst?
Still, I did righteously in bringing doubts
For the law to solve, — take the solution now!
" Seeing that the said associates, wife and priest,
Bear themselves not without some touch of blame

— Else why the pother, scandal and outcry
Which trouble our peace and require chastisement?
We, for complicity in Pompilia's flight
And deviation, and carnal intercourse
With the same, do set aside and relegate
The Canon Caponsacchi for three years
At Civita in the neighborhood of Rome:
And we consign Pompilia to the care
Of a certain Sisterhood of penitents
I' the city's self, expert to deal with such." 1220
Word for word, there's your judgment! Read it, lords,
Re-utter your deliberate penalty
For the crime yourselves establish! Your award —
Who chop a man's right-hand off at the wrist
For tracing with forefinger words in wine
O' the table of a drinking-booth that bear
Interpretation as they mocked the Church!
— Who brand a woman black between the breasts
For sinning by connection with a Jew:
While for the Jew's self — pudency be dumb! 1230
You mete out punishment such and such, yet so
Punish the adultery of wife and priest!
Take note of that, before the Molinists do,
And read me right the riddle, since right must be!
While I stood rapt away with wonderment,
Voices broke in upon my mood and muse.
"Do you sleep?" began the friends at either ear,
"The case is settled, — you willed it should be so —
None of our counsel, always recollect!
With law's award, budge! Back into your place! 1240
Your betters shall arrange the rest for you.
We'll enter a new action, claim divorce:
Your marriage was a cheat themselves allow:
You erred i' the person, — might have married thus

Your sister or your daughter unaware.
We 'll gain you, that way, liberty at least,
Sure of so much by law's own showing. Up
And off with you and your unluckiness —
Leave us to bury the blunder, sweep things smooth!"
I was in humble frame of mind, be sure!
I bowed, betook me to my place again.
Station by station I retraced the road,
Touched at this hostel, passed this post-house by,
Where, fresh-remembered yet, the fugitives
Had risen to the heroic stature: still —
"That was the bench they sat on, — there 's the board
They took the meal at, — yonder garden-ground
They leaned across the gate of," — ever a word
O' the Helen and the Paris, with "Ha! you 're he,
The . . . much-commiserated husband?" Step
By step, across the pelting, did I reach
Arezzo, underwent the archway's grin,
Traversed the length of sarcasm in the street,
Found myself in my horrible house once more,
And after a colloquy . . . no word assists!
With the mother and the brothers, stiffened me
Straight out from head to foot as dead man does,
And, thus prepared for life as he for hell,
Marched to the public Square and met the world.
Apologize for the pincers, palliate screws?
Ply me with such toy-trifles, I entreat!
Trust who has tried both sulphur and sops-in-wine!

I played the man as I best might, bade friends
Put non-essentials by and face the fact.
"What need to hang myself as you advise?
The paramour is banished, — the ocean's width,
Or the suburb's length, — to Ultima Thule, say,

Or Proxima Civitas, what 's the odds of name
And place ? He 's banished, and the fact 's the thing.
Why should law banish innocence an inch ?
Here 's guilt then, what else do I care to know ?
The adulteress lies imprisoned, — whether in a well
With bricks above and a snake for company,
Or tied by a garter to a bed-post, — much
I mind what 's little, — least 's enough and to spare !
The little fillip on the coward's cheek
Serves as though crab-tree cudgel broke his pate.
Law has pronounced there 's punishment, less or more :
And I take note o' the fact and use it thus —
For the first flaw in the original bond,
I claim release. My contract was to wed
The daughter of Pietro and Violante. Both
Protest they never had a child at all.
Then I have never made a contract : good !
Cancel me quick the thing pretended one.
I shall be free. What matter if hurried over
The harbor-boom by a great favoring tide,
Or the last of a spent ripple that lifts and leaves ?
The Abate is about it. Laugh who wins !
You shall not laugh me out of faith in law !
I listen, through all your noise, to Rome ! "
Rome spoke.
In three months letters thence admonished me,
" Your plan for the divorce is all mistake.
It would hold, now, had you, taking thought to wed
Rachel of the blue eye and golden hair,
Found swarth-skinned Leah cumber couch next day :
But Rachel, blue-eyed golden-haired aright,
Proving to be only Laban's child, not Lot's,
Remains yours all the same for evermore.
No whit to the purpose is your plea : you err

I' the person and the quality — nowise
In the individual, — that 's the case in point!
You go to the ground, — are met by a cross-suit
For separation, of the Rachel here,
From bed and board, — she is the injured one,
You did the wrong and have to answer it.
As for the circumstance of imprisonment
And color it lends to this your new attack,
Never fear, that point is considered too!
The durance is already at an end;
The convent-quiet preyed upon her health,
She is transferred now to her parents' house
— No-parents, when that cheats and plunders you,
But parentage again confessed in full,
When such confession pricks and plagues you more —
As now — for, this their house is not the house
In Via Vittoria wherein neighbors' watch
Might incommode the freedom of your wife,
But a certain villa smothered up in vines
At the town's edge by the gate i' the Pauline Way,
Out of eye-reach, out of ear-shot, little and lone,
Whither a friend, — at Civita, we hope,
A good half-dozen-hours' ride off, — might, some eve,
Betake himself, and whence ride back, some morn,
Nobody the wiser: but be that as it may,
Do not afflict your brains with trifles now.
You have still three suits to manage, all and each
Ruinous truly should the event play false.
It is indeed the likelier so to do,
That brother Paul, your single prop and stay,
After a vain attempt to bring the Pope
To set aside procedures, sit himself
And summarily use prerogative,
Afford us the infallible finger's tact

To disentwine your tangle of affairs,
Paul, — finding it moreover past his strength
To stem the irruption, bear Rome's ridicule
Of . . . since friends must speak . . . to be round with you . . .
Of the old outwitted husband, wronged and wroth,
Pitted against a brace of juveniles —
A brisk priest who is versed in Ovid's art
More than his Summa, and a gamesome wife
Able to act Corinna without book,
Beside the waggish parents who played dupes
To dupe the duper — (and truly divers scenes
Of the Arezzo palace, tickle rib
And tease eye till the tears come, so we laugh ;
Nor wants the shock at the inn its comic force,
And then the letters and poetry — *merum sal!*)
— Paul, finally, in such a state of things,
After a brief temptation to go jump
And join the fishes in the Tiber, drowns
Sorrow another and a wiser way :
House and goods, he has sold all off, is gone,
Leaves Rome, — whether for France or Spain, who knows ?
Or Britain almost divided from our orb.
You have lost him anyhow."
Now, — I see my lords
Shift in their seat, — would I could do the same !
They probably please expect my bile was moved
To purpose, nor much blame me : now, they judge,
The fiery titillation urged my flesh
Break through the bonds. By your pardon, no, sweet Sirs !
I got such missives in the public place ;
When I sought home, — with such news, mounted stair

And sat at last in the sombre gallery,
('T was Autumn, the old mother in bed betimes,
Having to bear that cold, the finer frame
Of her daughter-in-law had found intolerable —
The brother, walking misery away
O' the mountain-side with dog and gun belike)
As I supped, ate the coarse bread, drank the wine
Weak once, now acrid with the toad's-head-squeeze,
My wife's bestowment, — I broke silence thus:
"Let me, a man, manfully meet the fact,
Confront the worst o' the truth, end, and have peace!
I am irremediably beaten here, —
The gross illiterate vulgar couple, — bah!
Why, they have measured forces, mastered mine,
Made me their spoil and prey from first to last.
They have got my name, — 't is nailed now fast to theirs,
The child or changeling is anyway my wife;
Point by point as they plan they execute,
They gain all, and I lose all — even to the lure
That led to loss, — they have the wealth again
They hazarded awhile to hook me with,
Have caught the fish and find the bait entire:
They even have their child or changeling back
To trade with, turn to account a second time.
The brother presumably might tell a tale
Or give a warning, — he, too, flies the field,
And with him vanish help and hope of help.
They have caught me in the cavern where I fell,
Covered my loudest cry for human aid
With this enormous paving-stone of shame.
Well, are we demigods or merely clay?
Is success still attendant on desert?
Is this, we live on, heaven and the final state,

Or earth which means probation to the end?
Why claim escape from man's predestined lot
Of being beaten and baffled? — God's decree,
In which I, bowing bruised head, acquiesce.
One of us Franceschini fell long since
I' the Holy Land, betrayed, tradition runs,
To Paynims by the feigning of a girl
He rushed to free from ravisher, and found
Lay safe enough with friends in ambuscade
Who flayed him while she clapped her hands and laughed:
Let me end, falling by a like device.
It will not be so hard. I am the last
O' my line which will not suffer any more.
I have attained to my full fifty years,
(About the average of us all, 't is said,
Though it seems longer to the unlucky man)
— Lived through my share of life; let all end here,
Me and the house and grief and shame at once.
Friends my informants, — I can bear your blow!"
And I believe 't was in no unmeet match
For the stoic's mood, with something like a smile,
That, when morose December roused me next,
I took into my hand, broke seal to read
The new epistle from Rome. "All to no use!
Whate'er the turn next injury take," smiled I,
"Here 's one has chosen his part and knows his cue.
I am done with, dead now; strike away, good friends!
Are the three suits decided in a trice?
Against me, — there 's no question! How does it go?
Is the parentage of my wife demonstrated
Infamous to her wish? Parades she now
Loosed of the cincture that so irked the loin?
Is the last penny extracted from my purse

To mulct me for demanding the first pound
Was promised in return for value paid?
Has the priest, with nobody to court beside,
Courted the Muse in exile, hitched my hap
Into a rattling ballad-rhyme which, bawled
At tavern-doors, wakes rapture everywhere,
And helps cheap wine down throat this Christmas time,
Beating the bagpipes? Any or all of these!
As well, good friends, you cursed my palace here
To its old cold stone face, — stuck your cap for crest
Over the shield that 's extant in the Square, —
Or spat on the statue's cheek, the impatient world
Sees cumber tomb-top in our family church:
Let him creep under covert as I shall do,
Half below-ground already indeed. Good-bye!
My brothers are priests, and childless so; that 's well —
And, thank God most for this, no child leave I —
None after me to bear till his heart break
The being a Franceschini and my son!"

"Nay," said the letter, "but you have just that!
A babe, your veritable son and heir —
Lawful, — 't is only eight months since your wife
Left you, — so, son and heir, your babe was born
Last Wednesday in the villa, — you see the cause
For quitting Convent without beat of drum,
Stealing a hurried march to this retreat
That 's not so savage as the Sisterhood
To slips and stumbles: Pietro's heart is soft,
Violante leans to pity's side, — the pair
Ushered you into life a bouncing boy:
And he 's already hidden away and safe
From any claim on him you mean to make —
They need him for themselves, — don't fear, they know

The use o' the bantling, — the nerve thus laid bare
To nip at, new and nice, with finger-nail!"

Then I rose up like fire, and fire-like roared.
What, all is only beginning not ending now?
The worm which wormed its way from skin through flesh
To the bone and there lay biting, did its best, —
What, it goes on to scrape at the bone's self,
Will wind to inmost marrow and madden me?
There 's to be yet my representative,
Another of the name shall keep displayed
The flag with the ordure on it, brandish still
The broken sword has served to stir a jakes?
Who will he be, how will you call the man?
A Franceschini, — when who cut my purse,
Filched my name, hemmed me round, hustled me hard
As rogues at a fair some fool they strip i' the midst,
When these count gains, vaunt pillage presently: —
But a Caponsacchi, oh, be very sure!
When what demands its tribute of applause
Is the cunning and impudence o' the pair of cheats,
The lies and lust o' the mother, and the brave
Bold carriage of the priest, worthily crowned
By a witness to his feat i' the following age, —
And how this three-fold cord could hook and fetch
And land leviathan that king of pride!
Or say, by some mad miracle of chance,
Is he indeed my flesh and blood, this babe?
Was it because fate forged a link at last
Betwixt my wife and me, and both alike
Found we had henceforth some one thing to love,
Was it when she could damn my soul indeed
She unlatched door, let all the devils o' the dark

Dance in on me to cover her escape?
Why then, the surplusage of disgrace, the spilth
Over and above the measure of infamy,
Failing to take effect on my coarse flesh
Seasoned with scorn now, saturate with shame, — 1510
Is saved to instil on and corrode the brow,
The baby-softness of my first-born child —
The child I had died to see though in a dream,
The child I was bid strike out for, beat the wave
And baffle the tide of troubles where I swam,
So I might touch shore, lay down life at last
At the feet so dim and distant and divine
Of the apparition, as 't were Mary's Babe
Had held, through night and storm, the torch aloft, —
Born now in very deed to bear this brand 1520
On forehead and curse me who could not save!
Rather be the town talk true, square's jest, street's jeer
True, my own inmost heart's confession true,
And he the priest's bastard and none of mine!
Ay, there was cause for flight, swift flight and sure!
The husband gets unruly, breaks all bounds
When he encounters some familiar face,
Fashion of feature, brow and eyes and lips
Where he least looked to find them, — time to fly!
This bastard then, a nest for him is made, 1530
As the manner is of vermin, in my flesh:
Shall I let the filthy pest buzz, flap and sting,
Busy at my vitals and, nor hand nor foot
Lift, but let be, lie still and rot resigned?
No, I appeal to God, — what says Himself,
How lessons Nature when I look to learn?
Why, that I am alive, am still a man
With brain and heart and tongue and right-hand too —
Nay, even with friends, in such a cause as this,

To right me if I fail to take my right.
No more of law ; a voice beyond the law
Enters my heart, *Quis est pro Domino?*

Myself, in my own Vittiano, told the tale
To my own serving-people summoned there :
Told the first half of it, scarce heard to end
By judges who got done with judgment quick
And clamored to go execute her 'hest —
Who cried " Not one of us that dig your soil
And dress your vineyard, prune your olive-trees,
But would have brained the man debauched our wife,
And staked the wife whose lust allured the man,
And paunched the Duke, had it been possible,
Who ruled the land yet barred us such revenge ! "
I fixed on the first whose eyes caught mine, some four
Resolute youngsters with the heart still fresh,
Filled my purse with the residue o' the coin
Uncaught-up by my wife whom haste made blind,
Donned the first rough and rural garb I found,
Took whatsoever weapon came to hand,
And out we flung and on we ran or reeled
Romeward. I have no memory of our way,
Only that, when at intervals the cloud
Of horror about me opened to let in life,
I listened to some song in the ear, some snatch
Of a legend, relic of religion, stray
Fragment of record very strong and old
Of the first conscience, the anterior right,
The God's-gift to mankind, impulse to quench
The antagonistic spark of hell and tread
Satan and all his malice into dust,
Declare to the world the one law, right is right.
Then the cloud re-encompassed me, and so

I found myself, as on the wings of winds,
Arrived: I was at Rome on Christmas Eve.

Festive bells — everywhere the Feast o' the Babe,
Joy upon earth, peace and good will to man!
I am baptized. I started and let drop
The dagger. "Where is it, His promised peace?"
Nine days o' the Birth-Feast did I pause and pray
To enter into no temptation more.
I bore the hateful house, my brother's once,
Deserted, — let the ghost of social joy
Mock and make mouths at me from empty room
And idle door that missed the master's step, —
Bore the frank wonder of incredulous eyes,
As my own people watched without a word,
Waited, from where they huddled round the hearth
Black like all else, that nod so slow to come.
I stopped my ears even to the inner call
Of the dread duty, only heard the song
"Peace upon earth," saw nothing but the face
O' the Holy Infant and the halo there
Able to cover yet another face
Behind it, Satan's which I else should see.
But, day by day, joy waned and withered off:
The Babe's face, premature with peak and pine,
Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,
Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared,
And showed only the Cross at end of all,
Left nothing more to interpose 'twixt me
And the dread duty: for the angels' song,
"Peace upon earth," louder and louder pealed
"O Lord, how long, how long be unavenged?"
On the ninth day, this grew too much for man.
I started up — "Some end must be!" At once,

Silence: then, scratching like a death-watch-tick,
Slowly within my brain was syllabled,
"One more concession, one decisive way
And but one, to determine thee the truth, —
This way, in fine, I whisper in thy ear:
Now doubt, anon decide, thereupon act!"

"That is a way, thou whisperest in my ear!
I doubt, I will decide, then act," said I —
Then beckoned my companions: "Time is come!"

And so, all yet uncertain save the will
To do right, and the daring aught save leave
Right undone, I did find myself at last
I' the dark before the villa with my friends,
And made the experiment, the final test,
Ultimate chance that ever was to be
For the wretchedness inside. I knocked, pronounced
The name, the predetermined touch for truth,
"What welcome for the wanderer? Open straight —"
To the friend, physician, friar upon his rounds,
Traveller belated, beggar lame and blind?
No, but — "to Caponsacchi!" And the door
Opened.
And then, — why, even then, I think,
I' the minute that confirmed my worst of fears,
Surely, — I pray God that I think aright! —
Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing
Who once was good and pure, was once my lamb
And lay in my bosom, had the well-known shape
Fronted me in the door-way, — stood there faint
With the recent pang perhaps of giving birth
To what might, though by miracle, seem my child, —
Nay more, I will say, had even the aged fool

Pietro, the dotard, in whom folly and age
Wrought, more than enmity or malevolence,
To practise and conspire against my peace, —
Had either of these but opened, I had paused.
But it was she the hag, she that brought hell
For a dowry with her to her husband's house,
She the mock-mother, she that made the match
And married me to perdition, spring and source
O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart
To brain and hailed the Fury gave it birth, —
Violante Comparini, she it was,
With the old grin amid the wrinkles yet,
Opened: as if in turning from the Cross,
With trust to keep the sight and save my soul,
I had stumbled, first thing, on the serpent's head
Coiled with a leer at foot of it.
There was the end!
Then was I rapt away by the impulse, one
Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need
To abolish that detested life. 'T was done:
You know the rest and how the folds o' the thing,
Twisting for help, involved the other two
More or less serpent-like: how I was mad,
Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,
And ended so.
You came on me that night,
Your officers of justice, — caught the crime
In the first natural frenzy of remorse?
Twenty miles off, sound sleeping as a child
On a cloak i' the straw which promised shelter first,
With the bloody arms beside me, — was it not so?
Wherefore not? Why, how else should I be found?
I was my own self, had my sense again,
My soul safe from the serpents. I could sleep:

Indeed and, dear my lords, I shall sleep now,
Spite of my shoulder, in five minutes' space,
When you dismiss me, having truth enough!
It is but a few days are passed, I find,
Since this adventure. Do you tell me, four?
Then the dead are scarce quiet where they lie,
Old Pietro, old Violante, side by side
At the church Lorenzo, — oh, they know it well!
So do I. But my wife is still alive,
Has breath enough to tell her story yet,
Her way, which is not mine, no doubt at all.
And Caponsacchi, you have summoned him, —
Was he so far to send for? Not at hand?
I thought some few o' the stabs were in his heart,
Or had not been so lavish: less had served.
Well, he too tells his story, — florid prose
As smooth as mine is rough. You see, my lords,
There will be a lying intoxicating smoke
Born of the blood, — confusion probably, —
For lies breed lies — but all that rests with you!
The trial is no concern of mine; with me
The main of the care is over: I at least
Recognize who took that huge burthen off,
Let me begin to live again. I did
God's bidding and man's duty, so, breathe free;
Look you to the rest! I heard Himself prescribe,
That great Physician, and dared lance the core
Of the bad ulcer; and the rage abates,
I am myself and whole now: I prove cured
By the eyes that see, the ears that hear again,
The limbs that have relearned their youthful play,
The healthy taste of food and feel of clothes
And taking to our common life once more,
All that now urges my defence from death.

The willingness to live, what means it else ?
Before, — but let the very action speak !
Judge for yourselves, what life seemed worth to me
Who, not by proxy but in person, pitched
Head-foremost into danger as a fool
That never cares if he can swim or no —
So he but find the bottom, braves the brook.
No man omits precaution, quite neglects
Secrecy, safety, schemes not how retreat,
Having schemed he might advance. Did I so scheme ?
Why, with a warrant which 't is ask and have,
With horse thereby made mine without a word,
I had gained the frontier and slept safe that night.
Then, my companions, — call them what you please,
Slave or stipendiary, — what need of one
To me whose right-hand did its owner's work ?
Hire an assassin yet expose yourself ?
As well buy glove and then thrust naked hand
I' the thorn-bush. No, the wise man stays at home,
Sends only agents out, with pay to earn :
At home, when they come back, — he straight discards
Or else disowns. Why use such tools at all
When a man's foes are of his house, like mine,
Sit at his board, sleep in his bed ? Why noise,
When there 's the *acquetta* and the silent way ?
Clearly my life was valueless.

But now
Health is returned, and sanity of soul
Nowise indifferent to the body's harm.
I find the instinct bids me save my life ;
My wits, too, rally round me ; I pick up
And use the arms that strewed the ground before,
Unnoticed or spurned aside : I take my stand,

Make my defence. God shall not lose a life
May do Him further service, while I speak
And you hear, you my judges and last hope!
You are the law: 't is to the law I look.
I began life by hanging to the law,
To the law it is I hang till life shall end.
My brother made appeal to the Pope, 't is true,
To stay proceedings, judge my cause himself
Nor trouble law, — some fondness of conceit
That rectitude, sagacity sufficed
The investigator in a case like mine,
Dispensed with the machine of law. The Pope
Knew better, set aside my brother's plea
And put me back to law, — referred the cause
Ad judices meos, — doubtlessly did well.
Here, then, I clutch my judges, — I claim law —
Cry, by the higher law whereof your law
O' the land is humbly representative, —
Cry, on what point is it, where either accuse,
I fail to furnish you defence? I stand
Acquitted, actually or virtually,
By every intermediate kind of court
That takes account of right or wrong in man,
Each unit in the series that begins
With God's throne, ends with the tribunal here.
God breathes, not speaks, his verdicts, felt not heard,
Passed on successively to each court I call
Man's conscience, custom, manners, all that make
More and more effort to promulgate, mark
God's verdict in determinable words,
Till last come human jurists — solidify
Fluid result, — what 's fixable lies forged,
Statute, — the residue escapes in fume,
Yet hangs aloft, a cloud, as palpable

To the finer sense as word the legist welds.
Justinian's Pandects only make precise
What simply sparkled in men's eyes before,
Twitched in their brow or quivered on their lip,
Waited the speech they called but would not come.
These courts then, whose decree your own confirms, —
Take my whole life, not this last act alone,
Look on it by the light reflected thence!
What has Society to charge me with?
Come, unreservedly, — favor none nor fear, —
I am Guido Franceschini, am I not?
You know the courses I was free to take?
I took just that which let me serve the Church,
I gave it all my labor in body and soul
Till these broke down i' the service. "Specify?"
Well, my last patron was a Cardinal.
I left him unconvicted of a fault —
Was even helped, by way of gratitude,
Into the new life that I left him for,
This very misery of the marriage, — he
Made it, kind soul, so far as in him lay —
Signed the deed where you yet may see his name.
He is gone to his reward, — dead, being my friend
Who could have helped here also, — that, of course!
So far, there's my acquittal, I suppose.
Then comes the marriage itself — no question, lords.
Of the entire validity of that!
In the extremity of distress, 't is true,
For after-reasons, furnished abundantly,
I wished the thing invalid, went to you
Only some months since, set you duly forth
My wrong and prayed your remedy, that a cheat
Should not have force to cheat my whole life long.
"Annul a marriage? 'T is impossible!

Though ring about your neck be brass not gold,
Needs must it clasp, gangrene you all the same!"
Well, let me have the benefit, just so far,
O' the fact announced, — my wife then is my wife,
I have allowance for a husband's right.
I am charged with passing right's due bound, — such acts
As I thought just, my wife called cruelty,
Complained of in due form, — convoked no court
Of common gossipry, but took her wrongs —
And not once, but so long as patience served —
To the town's top, jurisdiction's pride of place,
To the Archbishop and the Governor.
These heard her charge with my reply, and found
That futile, this sufficient: they dismissed
The hysteric querulous rebel, and confirmed
Authority in its wholesome exercise,
They, with directest access to the facts.
"— Ay, for it was their friendship favored you,
Hereditary alliance against a breach
I' the social order: prejudice for the name
Of Franceschini!" — So I hear it said:
But not here. You, lords, never will you say
"Such is the nullity of grace and truth,
Such the corruption of the faith, such lapse
Of law, such warrant have the Molinists
For daring reprehend us as they do, —
That we pronounce it just a common case,
Two dignitaries, each in his degree
First, foremost, this the spiritual head, and that
The secular arm o' the body politic,
Should, for mere wrongs' love and injustice' sake,
Side with, aid and abet in cruelty
This broken beggarly noble, — bribed perhaps
By his watered wine and mouldy crust of bread —

Rather than that sweet tremulous flower-like wife
Who kissed their hands and curled about their feet
Looking the irresistible loveliness
In tears that takes man captive, turns " . . . enough!
Do you blast your predecessors? What forbids
Posterity to trebly blast yourselves
Who set the example and instruct their tongue?
You dreaded the crowd, succumbed to the popular cry,
Or else, would nowise seem defer thereto
And yield to public clamor though i' the right!
You ridded your eye of my unseemliness,
The noble whose misfortune wearied you, —
Or, what 's more probable, made common cause
With the cleric section, punished in myself
Maladroit uncomplaisant laity,
Defective in behavior to a priest
Who claimed the customary partnership
I' the house and the wife. Lords, any lie will serve!
Look to it, — or allow me freed so far!

Then I proceed a step, come with clean hands
Thus far, re-tell the tale told eight months since.
The wife, you allow so far, I have not wronged,
Has fled my roof, plundered me and decamped
In company with the priest her paramour:
And I gave chase, came up with, caught the two
At the wayside inn where both had spent the night,
Found them in flagrant fault, and found as well,
By documents with name and plan and date,
The fault was furtive then that 's flagrant now,
Their intercourse a long established crime.
I did not take the license law's self gives
To slay both criminals o' the spot at the time,
But held my hand, — preferred play prodigy

Of patience which the world calls cowardice,
Rather than seem anticipate the law
And cast discredit on its organs, — you.
So, to your bar I brought both criminals,
And made my statement: heard their counter-charge,
Nay, — their corroboration of my tale,
Nowise disputing its allegements, not
I' the main, not more than nature's decency
Compels men to keep silence in this kind, —
Only contending that the deeds avowed
Would take another color and bear excuse.
You were to judge between us; so you did.
You disregard the excuse, you breathe away
The color of innocence and leave guilt black,
"Guilty" is the decision of the court,
And that I stand in consequence untouched,
One white integrity from head to heel.
Not guilty? Why then did you punish them?
True, punishment has been inadequate —
'T is not I only, not my friends that joke,
My foes that jeer, who echo "inadequate" —
For, by a chance that comes to help for once,
The same case simultaneously was judged
At Arezzo, in the province of the Court
Where the crime had its beginning but not end.
They then, deciding on but half o' the crime,
The effraction, robbery, — features of the fault
I never cared to dwell upon at Rome, —
What was it they adjudged as penalty
To Pompilia, — the one criminal o' the pair
Amenable to their judgment, not the priest
Who is Rome's? Why, just imprisonment for life
I' the Stinche. There was Tuscany's award
To a wife that robs her husband: you at Rome —

Having to deal with adultery in a wife
And, in a priest, breach of the priestly vow —
Give gentle sequestration for a month
In a manageable Convent, then release,
You call imprisonment, in the very house
O' the very couple, which the aim and end
Of the culprits' crime was — just to reach and rest
And there take solace and defy me : well, —
This difference 'twixt their penalty and yours
Is immaterial : make your penalty less —
Merely that she should henceforth wear black gloves
And white fan, she who wore the opposite —
Why, all the same the fact o' the thing subsists.
Reconcile to your conscience as you may,
Be it on your own heads, you pronounced but half
O' the penalty for heinousness like hers
And his, that pays a fault at Carnival
Of comfit-pelting past discretion's law,
Or accident to handkerchief in Lent
Which falls perversely as a lady kneels
Abruptly, and but half conceals her neck!
I acquiesce for my part : punished, though
By a pin-point scratch, means guilty : guilty means
— What have I been but innocent hitherto?
Anyhow, here the offence, being punished, ends.

Ends? — for you deemed so, did you not, sweet lords?
That was throughout the veritable aim
O' the sentence light or heavy, — to redress
Recognized wrong? You righted me, I think?
Well then, — what if I, at this last of all,
Demonstrate you, as my whole pleading proves,
No particle of wrong received thereby
One atom of right? — that cure grew worse disease?

That in the process you call "justice done"
All along you have nipped away just inch
By inch the creeping climbing length of plague
Breaking my tree of life from root to branch,
And left me, after all and every act
Of your interference, — lightened of what load?
At liberty wherein? Mere words and wind!
"Now I was saved, now I should feel no more
The hot breath, find a respite from fixed eye
And vibrant tongue!" Why, scarce your back was turned,
There was the reptile, that feigned death at first,
Renewing its detested spire and spire
Around me, rising to such heights of hate
That, so far from mere purpose now to crush
And coil itself on the remains of me,
Body and mind, and there flesh fang content,
Its aim is now to evoke life from death,
Make me anew, satisfy in my son
The hunger I may feed but never sate,
Tormented on to perpetuity, —
My son, whom, dead, I shall know, understand,
Feel, hear, see, never more escape the sight
In heaven that 's turned to hell, or hell returned
(So rather say) to this same earth again, —
Moulded into the image and made one,
Fashioned of soul as featured like in face,
First taught to laugh and lisp and stand and go
By that thief, poisoner and adulteress
I call Pompilia, he calls . . . sacred name,
Be unpronounced, be unpolluted here!
And last led up to the glory and prize of hate
By his . . . foster-father, Caponsacchi's self,
The perjured priest, pink of conspirators,

Tricksters and knaves, yet polished, superfine,
Manhood to model adolescence by !
Lords, look on me, declare, — when, what I show,
Is nothing more nor less than what you deemed
And doled me out for justice, — what did you say ?
For reparation, restitution and more, —
Will you not thank, praise, bid me to your breasts
For having done the thing you thought to do,
And thoroughly trampled out sin's life at last ?
I have heightened phrase to make your soft speech serve,
Doubled the blow you but essayed to strike,
Carried into effect your mandate here
That else had fallen to ground : mere duty done,
Oversight of the master just supplied
By zeal i' the servant. I, being used to serve,
Have simply . . . what is it they charge me with ?
Blackened again, made legible once more
Your own decree, not permanently writ,
Rightly conceived but all too faintly traced.
It reads efficient, now, comminatory,
A terror to the wicked, answers so
The mood o' the magistrate, the mind of law.
Absolve, then, me, law's mere executant !
Protect your own defender, — save me, Sirs !
Give me my life, give me my liberty,
My good name and my civic rights again !
It would be too fond, too complacent play
Into the hands o' the devil, should we lose
The game here, I for God : a soldier-bee
That yields his life, exenterate with the stroke
O' the sting that saves the hive. I need that life.
Oh, never fear ! I 'll find life plenty use
Though it should last five years more, aches and all !
For, first thing, there 's the mother's age to help —

Let her come break her heart upon my breast,
Not on the blank stone of my nameless tomb!
The fugitive brother has to be bidden back
To the old routine, repugnant to the tread,
Of daily suit and service to the Church, —
Thro' gibe and jest, those stones that Shimei flung!
Ay, and the spirit-broken youth at home,
The awe-struck altar-ministrant, shall make
Amends for faith now palsied at the source,
Shall see truth yet triumphant, justice yet
A victor in the battle of this world!
Give me — for last, best gift — my son again,
Whom law makes mine, — I take him at your word,
Mine be he, by miraculous mercy, lords!
Let me lift up his youth and innocence
To purify my palace, room by room
Purged of the memories, lend from his bright brow
Light to the old proud paladin my sire
Shrunk now for shame into the darkest shade
O' the tapestry, showed him once and shrouds him now!
Then may we, — strong from that rekindled smile, —
Go forward, face new times, the better day.
And when, in times made better through your brave
Decision now, — might but Utopia be! —
Rome rife with honest women and strong men,
Manners reformed, old habits back once more,
Customs that recognize the standard worth, —
The wholesome household rule in force again,
Husbands once more God's representative,
Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
No longer men of Belial, with no aim
At leading silly women captive, but
Of rising to such duties as yours now, —
Then will I set my son at my right-hand

And tell his father's story to this point,
Adding "The task seemed superhuman, still
I dared and did it, trusting God and law:
And they approved of me: give praise to both!"
And if, for answer, he shall stoop to kiss
My hand, and peradventure start thereat, —
I engage to smile "That was an accident
I' the necessary process, — just a trip
O' the torture-irons in their search for truth, —
Hardly misfortune, and no fault at all."

VI.

GIUSEPPE CAPONSACCHI.

[Book VI. gives the story from Caponsacchi's point of view, and, moreover, carries with every word the direct impress of his personality, so that the verity of his account, the essential quality of Pompilia's influence upon his character, and the inmost nature both of his service to her and his love for her are clearly and convincingly revealed.]

Answer you, Sirs? Do I understand aright?
Have patience? In this sudden smoke from hell, —
So things disguise themselves, — I cannot see
My own hand held thus broad before my face
And know it again. Answer you? Then that means
Tell over twice what I, the first time, told
Six months ago: 't was here, I do believe,
Fronting you same three in this very room,
I stood and told you: yet now no one laughs,
Who then . . . nay, dear my lords, but laugh you did,
As good as laugh, what in a judge we style
Laughter — no levity, nothing indecorous, lords!
Only, — I think I apprehend the mood:
There was the blameless shrug, permissible smirk,
The pen's pretence at play with the pursed mouth,
The titter stifled in the hollow palm
Which rubbed the eyebrow and caressed the nose,
When I first told my tale: they meant, you know,

"The sly one, all this we are bound believe!
Well, he can say no other than what he says.
We have been young, too,—come, there's greater guilt!
Let him but decently disembroil himself,
Scramble from out the scrape nor move the mud,—
We solid ones may risk a finger-stretch!"
And now you sit as grave, stare as aghast
As if I were a phantom: now 't is—"Friend,
Collect yourself!"—no laughing matter more—
"Counsel the Court in this extremity,
Tell us again!"—tell that, for telling which,
I got the jocular piece of punishment,
Was sent to lounge a little in the place
Whence now of a sudden here you summon me
To take the intelligence from just—your lips!
You, Judge Tommati, who then tittered most,—
That she I helped eight months since to escape
Her husband, was retaken by the same,
Three days ago, if I have seized your sense,—
(I being disallowed to interfere,
Meddle or make in a matter none of mine,
For you and law were guardians quite enough
O' the innocent, without a pert priest's help)—
And that he has butchered her accordingly,
As she foretold and as myself believed,—
And, so foretelling and believing so,
We were punished, both of us, the merry way:
Therefore, tell once again the tale! For what?
Pompilia is only dying while I speak!
Why does the mirth hang fire and miss the smile?
My masters, there 's an old book, you should con
For strange adventures, applicable yet,
'T is stuffed with. Do you know that there was once
This thing: a multitude of worthy folk

Took recreation, watched a certain group
Of soldiery intent upon a game, —
How first they wrangled, but soon fell to play,
Threw dice, — the best diversion in the world.
A word in your ear, — they are now casting lots,
Ay, with that gesture quaint and cry uncouth,
For the coat of One murdered an hour ago!
I am a priest, — talk of what I have learned.
Pompilia is bleeding out her life belike,
Gasping away the latest breath of all,
This minute, while I talk — not while you laugh?

Yet, being sobered now, what is it you ask
By way of explanation? There 's the fact!
It seems to fill the universe with sight
And sound, — from the four corners of this earth
Tells itself over, to my sense at least.
But you may want it lower set i' the scale, —
Too vast, too close it clangs in the ear, perhaps;
You 'd stand back just to comprehend it more.
Well then, let me, the hollow rock, condense
The voice o' the sea and wind, interpret you
The mystery of this murder. God above!
It is too paltry, such a transference
O' the storm's roar to the cranny of the stone!

This deed, you saw begin — why does its end
Surprise you? Why should the event enforce
The lesson, we ourselves learned, she and I,
From the first o' the fact, and taught you, all in vain?
This Guido from whose throat you took my grasp,
Was this man to be favored, now, or feared,
Let do his will, or have his will restrained,
In the relation with Pompilia? Say!

Did any other man need interpose
— Oh, though first comer, though as strange at the work
As fribble must be, coxcomb, fool that 's near
To knave as, say, a priest who fears the world —
Was he bound brave the peril, save the doomed,
Or go on, sing his snatch and pluck his flower,
Keep the straight path and let the victim die ?
I held so ; you decided otherwise,
Saw no such peril, therefore no such need
To stop song, loosen flower, and leave path. Law,
Law was aware and watching, would suffice,
Wanted no priest's intrusion, palpably
Pretence, too manifest a subterfuge !
Whereupon I, priest, coxcomb, fribble and fool,
Ensconced me in my corner, thus rebuked,
A kind of culprit, over-zealous hound
Kicked for his pains to kennel ; I gave place
To you, and let the law reign paramount :
I left Pompilia to your watch and ward,
And now you point me — there and thus she lies !

Men, for the last time, what do you want with me ?
Is it, — you acknowledge, as it were, a use,
A profit in employing me ? — at length
I may conceivably help the august law ?
I am free to break the blow, next hawk that swoops
On next dove, nor miss much of good repute ?
Or what if this your summons, after all,
Be but the form of mere release, no more,
Which turns the key and lets the captive go ?
I have paid enough in person at Civita,
Am free, — what more need I concern me with ?
Thank you ! I am rehabilitated then,
A very reputable priest. But she —

The glory of life, the beauty of the world,
The splendor of heaven, . . . well, Sirs, does no one move?
Do I speak ambiguously? The glory, I say,
And the beauty, I say, and splendor, still say I,
Who, priest and trained to live my whole life long
On beauty and splendor, solely at their source,
God, — have thus recognized my food in her,
You tell me, that 's fast dying while we talk,
Pompilia! How does lenity to me,
Remit one death-bed pang to her? Come, smile!
The proper wink at the hot-headed youth
Who lets his soul show, through transparent words,
The mundane love that 's sin and scandal too!
You are all struck acquiescent now, it seems:
It seems the oldest, gravest signor here,
Even the redoubtable Tommati, sits
Chop-fallen, — understands how law might take
Service like mine, of brain and heart and hand,
In good part. Better late than never, law
You understand of a sudden, gospel too
Has a claim here, may possibly pronounce
Consistent with my priesthood, worthy Christ,
That I endeavored to save Pompilia?

Then,
You were wrong, you see: that 's well to see, though late:
That 's all we may expect of man, this side
The grave: his good is — knowing he is bad:
Thus will it be with us when the books ope
And we stand at the bar on judgment-day.
Well then, I have a mind to speak, see cause
To relume the quenched flax by this dreadful light,

Burn my soul out in showing you the truth.
I heard, last time I stood here to be judged,
What is priest's-duty, — labor to pluck tares
And weed the corn of Molinism; let me
Make you hear, this time, how, in such a case,
Man, be he in the priesthood or at plough,
Mindful of Christ or marching step by step
With . . . what 's his style, the other potentate
Who bids have courage and keep honor safe,
Nor let minuter admonition tease? —
How he is bound, better or worse, to act.
Earth will not end through this misjudgment, no!
For you and the others like you sure to come,
Fresh work is sure to follow, — wickedness
That wants withstanding. Many a man of blood,
Many a man of guile will clamor yet,
Bid you redress his grievance, — as he clutched
The prey, forsooth a stranger stepped between,
And there 's the good gripe in pure waste! My part
Is done; i' the doing it, I pass away
Out of the world. I want no more with earth.
Let me, in heaven's name, use the very snuff
O' the taper in one last spark shall show truth
For a moment, show Pompilia who was true!
Not for her sake, but yours: if she is dead,
Oh, Sirs, she can be loved by none of you
Most or least priestly! Saints, to do us good,
Must be in heaven, I seem to understand:
We never find them saints before, at least.
Be her first prayer then presently for you —
She has done the good to me . . .
What is all this?
There, I was born, have lived, shall die, a fool!
This is a foolish outset: — might with cause

Give color to the very lie o' the man,
The murderer, — make as if I loved his wife,
In the way he called love. He is the fool there!
Why, had there been in me the touch of taint,
I had picked up so much of knaves'-policy
As hide it, keep one hand pressed on the place
Suspected of a spot would damn us both.
Or no, not her! — not even if any of you
Dares think that I, i' the face of death, her death
That 's in my eyes and ears and brain and heart,
Lie, — if he does, let him! I mean to say,
So he stop there, stay thought from smirching her
The snow-white soul that angels fear to take
Untenderly. But, all the same, I know
I too am taintless, and I bare my breast.
You can't think, men as you are, all of you,
But that, to hear thus suddenly such an end
Of such a wonderful white soul, that comes
Of a man and murderer calling the white black,
Must shake me, trouble and disadvantage. Sirs,
Only seventeen!

Why, good and wise you are!
You might at the beginning stop my mouth:
So, none would be to speak for her, that knew.
I talk impertinently, and you bear,
All the same. This it is to have to do
With honest hearts: they easily may err,
But in the main they wish well to the truth.
You are Christians; somehow, no one ever plucked
A rag, even, from the body of the Lord,
To wear and mock with, but, despite himself,
He looked the greater and was the better. Yes,
I shall go on now. Does she need or not

I keep calm ? Calm I 'll keep as monk that croons
Transcribing battle, earthquake, famine, plague,
From parchment to his cloister's chronicle.
Not one word more from the point now !

I begin.

Yes, I am one of your body and a priest.
Also I am a younger son o' the House
Oldest now, greatest once, in my birth-town
Arezzo, I recognize no equal there —
(I want all arguments, all sorts of arms
That seem to serve, — use this for a reason, wait !)
Not therefore thrust into the Church, because
O' the piece of bread one gets there. We were first
Of Fiesole, that rings still with the fame
Of Capo-in-Sacco our progenitor :
When Florence ruined Fiesole, our folk
Migrated to the victor-city, and there
Flourished, — our palace and our tower attest,
In the Old Mercato, — this was years ago,
Four hundred, full, — no, it wants fourteen just.
Our arms are those of Fiesole itself,
The shield quartered with white and red : a branch
Are the Salviati of us, nothing more.
That were good help to the Church ? But better still —
Not simply for the advantage of my birth
I' the way of the world, was I proposed for priest ;
But because there 's an illustration, late
I' the day, that 's loved and looked to as a saint
Still in Arezzo, he was bishop of,
Sixty years since : he spent to the last doit
His bishop's-revenue among the poor,
And used to tend the needy and the sick,
Barefoot, because of his humility.

He it was, — when the Granduke Ferdinand
Swore he would raze our city, plough the place
And sow it with salt, because we Aretines
Had tied a rope about the neck, to hale
The statue of his father from its base
For hate's sake, — he availed by prayers and tears
To pacify the Duke and save the town.
This was my father's father's brother. You see,
For his sake, how it was I had a right
To the self-same office, bishop in the egg,
So, grew i' the garb and prattled in the school,
Was made expect, from infancy almost,
The proper mood o' the priest ; till time ran by
And brought the day when I must read the vows,
Declare the world renounced and undertake
To become priest and leave probation, — leap
Over the ledge into the other life,
Having gone trippingly hitherto up to the height
O'er the wan water. Just a vow to read!

I stopped short awe-struck. "How shall holiest flesh
Engage to keep such vow inviolate,
How much less mine ? I know myself too weak,
Unworthy ! Choose a worthier stronger man ! "
And the very Bishop smiled and stopped my mouth
In its mid-protestation. "Incapable ?
Qualmish of conscience ? Thou ingenuous boy !
Clear up the clouds and cast thy scruples far !
I satisfy thee there 's an easier sense
Wherein to take such vow than suits the first
Rough rigid reading. Mark what makes all smooth,
Nay, has been even a solace to myself !
The Jews who needs must, in their synagogue,
Utter sometimes the holy name of God,

A thing their superstition boggles at,
Pronounce aloud the ineffable sacrosanct, —
How does their shrewdness help them? In this wise;
Another set of sounds they substitute,
Jumble so consonants and vowels — how
Should I know? — that there grows from out the old
Quite a new word that means the very same —
And o'er the hard place slide they with a smile.
Giuseppe Maria Caponsacchi mine,
Nobody wants you in these latter days
To prop the Church by breaking your back-bone, —
As the necessary way was once, we know,
When Diocletian flourished and his like.
That building of the buttress-work was done
By martyrs and confessors: let it bide,
Add not a brick, but, where you see a chink,
Stick in a sprig of ivy or root a rose
Shall make amends and beautify the pile!
We profit as you were the painfullest
O' the martyrs, and you prove yourself a match
For the cruelest confessor ever was,
If you march boldly up and take your stand
Where their blood soaks, their bones yet strew the soil,
And cry 'Take notice, I the young and free
And well-to-do i' the world, thus leave the world,
Cast in my lot thus with no gay young world
But the grand old Church: she tempts me of the two!'
Renounce the world? Nay, keep and give it us!
Let us have you, and boast of what you bring.
We want the pick o' the earth to practise with,
Not its offscouring, halt and deaf and blind
In soul and body. There's a rubble-stone
Unfit for the front o' the building, stuff to stow
In a gap behind and keep us weather-tight;

There 's porphyry for the prominent place. Good lack!
Saint Paul has had enough and to spare, I trow,
Of ragged run-away Onesimus:
He wants the right-hand with the signet-ring
Of King Agrippa, now, to shake and use.
I have a heavy scholar cloistered up,
Close under lock and key, kept at his task
Of letting Fénelon know the fool he is,
In a book I promise Christendom next Spring.
Why, if he covets so much meat, the clown,
As a lark's wing next Friday, or, any day,
Diversion beyond catching his own fleas,
He shall be properly swinged, I promise him.
But you, who are so quite another paste
Of a man, — do you obey me? Cultivate
Assiduous that superior gift you have
Of making madrigals — (who told me? Ah!)
Get done a Marinesque Adoniad straight
With a pulse o' the blood a-pricking, here and there,
That I may tell the lady 'And he 's ours!' ''

So I became a priest: those terms changed all,
I was good enough for that, nor cheated so;
I could live thus and still hold head erect.
Now you see why I may have been before
A fribble and coxcomb, yet, as priest, break word
Nowise, to make you disbelieve me now.
I need that you should know my truth. Well, then,
According to prescription did I live,
— Conformed myself, both read the breviary
And wrote the rhymes, was punctual to my place
I' the Pieve, and as diligent at my post
Where beauty and fashion rule. I throve apace,
Sub-deacon, Canon, the authority

For delicate play at tarocs, and arbiter
O' the magnitude of fan-mounts: all the while
Wanting no whit the advantage of a hint
Benignant to the promising pupil, — thus:
"Enough attention to the Countess now,
The young one; 't is her mother rules the roast,
We know where, and puts in a word: go pay
Devoir to-morrow morning after mass!
Break that rash promise to preach, Passion-week!
Has it escaped you the Archbishop grunts
And snuffles when one grieves to tell his Grace
No soul dares treat the subject of the day
Since his own masterly handling it (ha, ha!)
Five years ago, — when somebody could help
And touch up an odd phrase in time of need,
(He, he!) — and somebody helps you, my son!
Therefore, don't prove so indispensable
At the Pieve, sit more loose i' the seat, nor grow
A fixture by attendance morn and eve!
Arezzo 's just a haven midway Rome —
Rome 's the eventual harbor, — make for port,
Crowd sail, crack cordage! And your cargo be
A polished presence, a genteel manner, wit
At will, and tact at every pore of you!
I sent our lump of learning, Brother Clout,
And Father Slouch, our piece of piety,
To see Rome and try suit the Cardinal.
Thither they clump-clumped, beads and book in hand,
And ever since 't is meat for man and maid
How both flopped down, prayed blessing on bent pate
Bald many an inch beyond the tonsure's need,
Never once dreaming, the two moony dolts,
There 's nothing moves his Eminence so much
As — far from all this awe at sanctitude —

Heads that wag, eyes that twinkle, modified mirth
At the closet-lectures on the Latin tongue
A lady learns so much by, we know where.
Why, body o' Bacchus, you should crave his rule
For pauses in the elegiac couplet, chasms
Permissible only to Catullus! There!
Now go to duty: brisk, break Priscian's head
By reading the day's office — there 's no help.
You 've Ovid in your poke to plaster that;
Amen 's at the end of all: then sup with me!"

Well, after three or four years of this life,
In prosecution of my calling, I
Found myself at the theatre one night
With a brother Canon, in a mood and mind
Proper enough for the place, amused or no:
When I saw enter, stand, and seat herself
A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad.
It was as when, in our cathedral once,
As I got yawningly through matin-song,
I saw *facchini* bear a burden up,
Base it on the high-altar, break away
A board or two, and leave the thing inside
Lofty and lone: and lo, when next I looked,
There was the Rafael! I was still one stare,
When — "Nay, I 'll make her give you back your gaze" —
Said Canon Conti; and at the word he tossed
A paper-twist of comfits to her lap,
And dodged and in a trice was at my back
Nodding from over my shoulder. Then she turned,
Looked our way, smiled the beautiful sad strange smile.
"Is not she fair? 'T is my new cousin," said he:
"The fellow lurking there i' the black o' the box
Is Guido, the old scapegrace: she 's his wife,

Married three years since: how his Countship sulks!
He has brought little back from Rome beside,
After the bragging, bullying. A fair face,
And — they do say — a pocketful of gold
When he can worry both her parents dead.
I don't go much there, for the chamber 's cold
And the coffee pale. I got a turn at first
Paying my duty: I observed they crouched
— The two old frightened family spectres — close
In a corner, each on each like mouse on mouse
I' the cat's cage: ever since, I stay at home.
Hallo, there 's Guido, the black, mean and small,
Bends his brows on us — please to bend your own
On the shapely nether limbs of Light-skirts there
By way of a diversion! I was a fool
To fling the sweetmeats. Prudence, for God's love!
To-morrow I 'll make my peace, e'en tell some fib,
Try if I can't find means to take you there."

That night and next day did the gaze endure,
Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam thro' shut eyes,
And not once changed the beautiful sad strange smile.
At vespers Conti leaned beside my seat
I' the choir, — part said, part sung — "*In ex-cel-sis* —
All 's to no purpose; I have louted low,
But he saw you staring — *quia sub* — don't incline
To know you nearer: him we would not hold
For Hercules, — the man would lick your shoe
If you and certain efficacious friends
Managed him warily, — but there 's the wife:
Spare her, because he beats her, as it is,
She 's breaking her heart quite fast enough — *jam tu* —
So, be you rational and make amends
With little Light-skirts yonder — *in secula*

Secu-lo-o-o-o-rum. Ah, you rogue! Every one knows
What great dame she makes jealous: one against one,
Play, and win both!"
Sirs, ere the week was out,
I saw and said to myself "Light-skirts hides teeth
Would make a dog sick, — the great dame shows spite
Should drive a cat mad: 't is but poor work this — 450
Counting one's fingers till the sonnet's crowned.
I doubt much if Marino really be
A better bard than Dante after all.
'T is more amusing to go pace at eve
I' the Duomo, — watch the day's last gleam outside
Turn, as into a skirt of God's own robe,
Those lancet-windows' jewelled miracle, —
Than go eat the Archbishop's ortolans,
Digest his jokes. Luckily Lent is near:
Who cares to look will find me in my stall 460
At the Pieve, constant to this faith at least —
Never to write a canzonet any more."

So, next week, 't was my patron spoke abrupt,
In altered guise. "Young man, can it be true
That after all your promise of sound fruit,
You have kept away from Countess young or old
And gone play truant in church all day long?
Are you turning Molinist?" I answered quick:
"Sir, what if I turned Christian? It might be.
The fact is, I am troubled in my mind, 470
Beset and pressed hard by some novel thoughts.
This your Arezzo is a limited world;
There's a strange Pope, — 't is said, a priest who thinks.
Rome is the port, you say: to Rome I go.
I will live alone, one does so in a crowd,

And look into my heart a little." "Lent
Ended," — I told friends — "I shall go to Rome."

One evening I was sitting in a muse
Over the opened "Summa," darkened round
By the mid-March twilight, thinking how my life
Had shaken under me, — broke short indeed
And showed the gap 'twixt what is, what should be, —
And into what abysm the soul may slip,
Leave aspiration here, achievement there,
Lacking omnipotence to connect extremes —
Thinking moreover . . . oh, thinking, if you like,
How utterly dissociated was I
A priest and celibate, from the sad strange wife
Of Guido, — just as an instance to the point,
Naught more, — how I had a whole store of strengths
Eating into my heart, which craved employ,
And she, perhaps, need of a finger's help, —
And yet there was no way in the wide world
To stretch out mine and so relieve myself, —
How when the page o' the Summa preached its best,
Her smile kept glowing out of it, as to mock
The silence we could break by no one word, —
There came a tap without the chamber-door,
And a whisper; when I bade who tapped speak out.
And, in obedience to my summons, last
In glided a masked muffled mystery,
Laid lightly a letter on the opened book,
Then stood with folded arms and foot demure,
Pointing as if to mark the minutes' flight.

I took the letter, read to the effect
That she, I lately flung the comfits to,
Had a warm heart to give me in exchange,
And gave it, — loved me and confessed it thus,

And bade me render thanks by word of mouth,
Going that night to such a side o' the house
Where the small terrace overhangs a street
Blind and deserted, not the street in front:
Her husband being away, the surly patch,
At his villa of Vittiano.
"And you?" — I asked:
"What may you be?" "Count Guido's kind of maid —
Most of us have two functions in his house.
We all hate him, the lady suffers much,
'T is just we show compassion, furnish help,
Specially since her choice is fixed so well.
What answer may I bring to cheer the sweet
Pompilia?"
Then I took a pen and wrote
"No more of this! That you are fair, I know:
But other thoughts now occupy my mind.
I should not thus have played the insensible
Once on a time. What made you, — may one ask, —
Marry your hideous husband? 'T was a fault,
And now you taste the fruit of it. Farewell."
"There!" smiled I as she snatched it and was gone —
"There, let the jealous miscreant, — Guido's self,
Whose mean soul grins through this transparent trick, —
Be balked so far, defrauded of his aim!
What fund of satisfaction to the knave,
Had I kicked this his messenger down stairs,
Trussed to the middle of her impudence,
And set his heart at ease so! No, indeed!
There 's the reply which he shall turn and twist
At pleasure, snuff at till his brain grow drunk,
As the bear does when he finds a scented glove

That puzzles him, — a hand and yet no hand,
Of other perfume than his own foul paw!
Last month, I had doubtless chosen to play the dupe,
Accepted the mock-invitation, kept
The sham appointment, cudgel beneath cloak,
Prepared myself to pull the appointer's self
Out of the window from his hiding-place
Behind the gown of this part-messenger
Part-mistress who would personate the wife.
Such had seemed once a jest permissible:
Now I am not i' the mood."
Back next morn brought
The messenger, a second letter in hand.
"You are cruel, Thyrsis, and Myrtilla moans
Neglected but adores you, makes request
For mercy: why is it you dare not come?
Such virtue is scarce natural to your age.
You must love some one else; I hear you do,
The Baron's daughter or the Advocate's wife,
Or both, — all 's one, would you make me the third —
I take the crumbs from table gratefully
Nor grudge who feasts there. 'Faith, I blush and blaze!
Yet if I break all bounds, there 's reason sure.
Are you determinedly bent on Rome?
I am wretched here, a monster tortures me:
Carry me with you! Come and say you will!
Concert this very evening! Do not write!
I am ever at the window of my room
Over the terrace, at the *Ave*. Come!"

I questioned — lifting half the woman's mask
To let her smile loose. "So, you gave my line
To the merry lady?" "She kissed off the wax,
And put what paper was not kissed away,

In her bosom to go burn : but merry, no !
She wept all night when evening brought no friend,
Alone, the unkind missive at her breast;
Thus Philomel, the thorn at her breast too,
Sings" . . . "Writes this second letter ?" "Even so !
Then she may peep at vespers forth ?" — "What risk
Do we run o' the husband ?" — "Ah, — no risk at all !
He is more stupid even than jealous. Ah —
That was the reason ? Why, the man 's away !
Beside, his bugbear is that friend of yours,
Fat little Canon Conti. He fears him,
How should he dream of you ? I told you truth :
He goes to the villa at Vittiano — 't is
The time when Spring-sap rises in the vine —
Spends the night there. And then his wife 's a child :
Does he think a child outwits him ? A mere child :
Yet so full grown, a dish for any duke.
Don't quarrel longer with such cates, but come !"

I wrote "In vain do you solicit me.
I am a priest : and you are wedded wife,
Whatever kind of brute your husband prove.
I have scruples, in short. Yet should you really show
Sign at the window . . . but nay, best be good !
My thoughts are elsewhere." "Take her that !"
"Again
Let the incarnate meanness, cheat and spy,
Mean to the marrow of him, make his heart
His food, anticipate hell's worm once more !
Let him watch shivering at the window — ay,
And let this hybrid, this his light-of-love
And lackey-of-lies, — a sage economy, —
Paid with embracings for the rank brass coin, —
Let her report and make him chuckle o'er

The break-down of my resolution now,
And lour at disappointment in good time!
— So tantalize and so enrage by turns,
Until the two fall each on the other like
Two famished spiders, as the coveted fly
That toys long, leaves their net and them at last!"
And so the missives followed thick and fast
For a month, say, — I still came at every turn
On the soft sly adder, endlong 'neath my tread.
I was met i' the street, made sign to in the church,
A slip was found i' the door-sill, scribbled word
'Twixt page and page o' the prayer-book in my place.
A crumpled thing dropped even before my feet,
Pushed through the blind, above the terrace-rail,
As I passed, by day, the very window once.
And ever from corners would be peering up
The messenger, with the self-same demand
"Obdurate still, no flesh but adamant?
Nothing to cure the wound, assuage the throe
O' the sweetest lamb that ever loved a bear?"
And ever my one answer in one tone —
"Go your ways, temptress! Let a priest read, pray,
Unplagued of vain talk, visions not for him!
In the end, you 'll have your will and ruin me!"

One day, a variation: thus I read:
"You have gained little by timidity.
My husband has found out my love at length,
Sees cousin Conti was the stalking-horse,
And you the game he covered, poor fat soul!
My husband is a formidable foe,
Will stick at nothing to destroy you. Stand
Prepared, or better, run till you reach Rome!
I bade you visit me, when the last place

My tyrant would have turned suspicious at,
Or cared to seek you in, was . . . why say, where?
But now all 's changed: beside, the season 's past
At the villa, — wants the master's eye no more.
Anyhow, I beseech you, stay away
From the window! He might well be posted there."

I wrote — "You raise my courage, or call up
My curiosity, who am but man.
Tell him he owns the palace, not the street
Under — that 's his and yours and mine alike.
If it should please me pad the path this eve,
Guido will have two troubles, first to get
Into a rage and then get out again.
Be cautious, though: at the *Ave!*"
You of the Court!
When I stood question here and reached this point
O' the narrative, — search notes and see and say
If some one did not interpose with smile
And sneer, "And prithee why so confident
That the husband must, of all needs, not the wife,
Fabricate thus, — what if the lady loved?
What if she wrote the letters?"
Learned Sir,
I told you there 's a picture in our church.
Well, if a low-browed verger sidled up
Bringing me, like a blotch, on his prod's point,
A transfixed scorpion, let the reptile writhe,
And then said "See a thing that Rafael made —
This venom issued from Madonna's mouth!"
I should reply, "Rather, the soul of you
Has issued from your body, like from like,
By way of the ordure-corner!"
But no less,

I tired of the same long black teasing lie
Obtruded thus at every turn ; the pest
Was far too near the picture, anyhow :
One does Madonna service, making clowns
Remove their dung-heap from the sacristy.
"I will to the window, as he tempts," said I :
"Yes, whom the easy love has failed allure,
This new bait of adventure tempts," — thinks he.
"Though the imprisoned lady keeps afar,
There will they lie in ambush, heads alert,
Kith, kin, and Count mustered to bite my heel.
No mother nor brother viper of the brood
Shall scuttle off without the instructive bruise!"

So I went: crossed street and street: "The next street's turn,
I stand beneath the terrace, see, above,
The black of the ambush-window. Then, in place
Of hand's throw of soft prelude over lute,
And cough that clears way for the ditty last," —
I began to laugh already — "he will have
'Out of the hole you hide in, on to the front,
Count Guido Franceschini, show yourself!
Hear what a man thinks of a thing like you,
And after, take this foulness in your face!'"

The words lay living on my lip, I made
The one-turn more — and there at the window stood,
Framed in its black square length, with lamp in hand,
Pompilia ; the same great, grave, griefful air
As stands i' the dusk, on altar that I know,
Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell,
Our Lady of all the Sorrows. Ere I knelt —
Assured myself that she was flesh and blood —
She had looked one look and vanished.

I thought — "Just so:
It was herself, they have set her there to watch —
Stationed to see some wedding-band go by,
On fair pretence that she must bless the bride,
Or wait some funeral with friends wind past,
And crave peace for the corpse that claims its due.
She never dreams they used her for a snare,
And now withdraw the bait has served its turn.
Well done, the husband, who shall fare the worse!"
And on my lip again was — "Out with thee,
Guido!" When all at once she reappeared;
But, this time, on the terrace overhead,
So close above me, she could almost touch
My head if she bent down; and she did bend,
While I stood still as stone, all eye, all ear.

She began — "You have sent me letters, Sir:
I have read none, I can neither read nor write;
But she you gave them to, a woman here,
One of the people in whose power I am,
Partly explained their sense, I think, to me
Obliged to listen while she inculcates
That you, a priest, can dare love me, a wife,
Desire to live or die as I shall bid,
(She makes me listen if I will or no)
Because you saw my face a single time.
It cannot be she says the thing you mean;
Such wickedness were deadly to us both:
But good true love would help me now so much —
I tell myself, you may mean good and true.
You offer me, I seem to understand,
Because I am in poverty and starve,
Much money, where one piece would save my life.
The silver cup upon the altar-cloth

Is neither yours to give nor mine to take;
But I might take one bit of bread therefrom,
Since I am starving, and return the rest,
Yet do no harm: this is my very case.
I am in that strait, I may not dare abstain
From so much of assistance as would bring
The guilt of theft on neither you nor me;
But no superfluous particle of aid.
I think, if you will let me state my case,
Even had you been so fancy-fevered here,
Not your sound self, you must grow healthy now —
Care only to bestow what I can take.
That it is only you in the wide world,
Knowing me nor in thought nor word nor deed,
Who, all unprompted save by your own heart,
Come proffering assistance now, — were strange
But that my whole life is so strange: as strange
It is, my husband whom I have not wronged
Should hate and harm me. For his own soul's sake,
Hinder the harm! But there is something more,
And that the strangest: it has got to be
Somehow for my sake too, and yet not mine,
— This is a riddle — for some kind of sake
Not any clearer to myself than you,
And yet as certain as that I draw breath, —
I would fain live, not die — oh no, not die!
My case is, I was dwelling happily
At Rome with those dear Comparini, called
Father and mother to me; when at once
I found I had become Count Guido's wife:
Who then, not waiting for a moment, changed
Into a fury of fire, if once he was
Merely a man: his face threw fire at mine,
He laid a hand on me that burned all peace,

All joy, all hope, and last all fear away,
Dipping the bough of life, so pleasant once,
In fire which shrivelled leaf and bud alike,
Burning not only present life but past,
Which you might think was safe beyond his reach.
He reached it, though, since that beloved pair,
My father once, my mother all those years,
That loved me so, now say I dreamed a dream
And bid me wake, henceforth no child of theirs,
Never in all the time their child at all.
Do you understand? I cannot: yet so it is.
Just so I say of you that proffer help:
I cannot understand what prompts your soul,
I simply needs must see that it is so,
Only one strange and wonderful thing more.
They came here with me, those two dear ones, kept
All the old love up, till my husband, till
His people here so tortured them, they fled.
And now, is it because I grow in flesh
And spirit one with him their torturer,
That they, renouncing him, must cast off me?
If I were graced by God to have a child,
Could I one day deny God graced me so?
Then, since my husband hates me, I shall break
No law that reigns in this fell house of hate,
By using — letting have effect so much
Of hate as hides me from that whole of hate
Would take my life which I want and must have —
Just as I take from your excess of love
Enough to save my life with, all I need.
The Archbishop said to murder me were sin:
My leaving Guido were a kind of death
With no sin, — more death, he must answer for.
Hear now what death to him and life to you

I wish to pay and owe. Take me to Rome!
You go to Rome, the servant makes me hear.
Take me as you would take a dog, I think,
Masterless left for strangers to maltreat:
Take me home like that — leave me in the house
Where the father and the mother are; and soon
They 'll come to know and call me by my name,
Their child once more, since child I am, for all
They now forget me, which is the worst o' the dream —
And the way to end dreams is to break them, stand,
Walk, go: then help me to stand, walk and go!
The Governor said the strong should help the weak:
You know how weak the strongest women are.
How could I find my way there by myself?
I cannot even call out, make them hear —
Just as in dreams: I have tried and proved the fact.
I have told this story and more to good great men,
The Archbishop and the Governor: they smiled.
'Stop your mouth, fair one!' — presently they frowned,
'Get you gone, disengage you from our feet!'
I went in my despair to an old priest,
Only a friar, no great man like these two,
But good, the Augustinian, people name
Romano, — he confessed me two months since:
He fears God, why then needs he fear the world?
And when he questioned how it came about
That I was found in danger of a sin —
Despair of any help from providence, —
'Since, though your husband outrage you,' said he,
'That is a case too common, the wives die
Or live, but do not sin so deep as this' —
Then I told — what I never will tell you —
How, worse than husband's hate, I had to bear
The love, — soliciting to shame called love, —

Of his brother, — the young idle priest i' the house
With only the devil to meet there. 'This is grave —
Yes, we must interfere: I counsel, — write
To those who used to be your parents once,
Of dangers here, bid them convey you hence!'
'But,' said I, 'when I neither read nor write?'
Then he took pity and promised 'I will write.'
If he did so, — why, they are dumb or dead:
Either they give no credit to the tale,
Or else, wrapped wholly up in their own joy
Of such escape, they care not who cries, still
I' the clutches. Anyhow, no word arrives.
All such extravagance and dreadfulness
Seems incident to dreaming, cured one way, —
Wake me! The letter I received this morn,
Said — if the woman spoke your very sense —
'You would die for me:' I can believe it now:
For now the dream gets to involve yourself.
First of all, you seemed wicked and not good,
In writing me those letters: you came in
Like a thief upon me. I this morning said
In my extremity, entreat the thief!
Try if he have in him no honest touch!
A thief might save me from a murderer.
'T was a thief said the last kind word to Christ:
Christ took the kindness and forgave the theft:
And so did I prepare what I now say.
But now, that you stand and I see your face,
Though you have never uttered word yet, — well, I know,
Here too has been dream-work, delusion too,
And that at no time, you with the eyes here,
Ever intended to do wrong by me,
Nor wrote such letters therefore. It is false,

And you are true, have been true, will be true.
To Rome then, — when is it you take me there?
Each minute lost is mortal. When? — I ask."

I answered "It shall be when it can be.
I will go hence and do your pleasure, find
The sure and speedy means of travel, then
Come back and take you to your friends in Rome.
There wants a carriage, money and the rest, —
A day's work by to-morrow at this time.
How shall I see you and assure escape?"

She replied, "Pass, to-morrow at this hour.
If I am at the open window, well:
If I am absent, drop a handkerchief
And walk by! I shall see from where I watch,
And know that all is done. Return next eve,
And next, and so till we can meet and speak!"
"To-morrow at this hour I pass," said I.
She was withdrawn.
Here is another point
I bid you pause at. When I told thus far,
Someone said, subtly, "Here at least was found
Your confidence in error, —you perceived
The spirit of the letters, in a sort,
Had been the lady's, if the body should be
Supplied by Guido: say, he forged them all!
Here was the unforged fact — she sent for you,
Spontaneously elected you to help,
— What men call, loved you: Guido read her mind,
Gave it expression to assure the world
The case was just as he foresaw: he wrote,
She spoke."
Sirs, that first simile serves still, —
That falsehood of a scorpion hatched, I say,

Nowhere i' the world but in Madonna's mouth.
Go on! Suppose, that falsehood foiled, next eve
Pictured Madonna raised her painted hand,
Fixed the face Rafael bent above the Babe,
On my face as I flung me at her feet:
Such miracle vouchsafed and manifest,
Would that prove the first lying tale was true?
Pompilia spoke, and I at once received,
Accepted my own fact, my miracle
Self-authorized and self-explained, — she chose
To summon me and signify her choice.
Afterward, — oh! I gave a passing glance
To a certain ugly cloud-shape, goblin-shred
Of hell-smoke hurrying past the splendid moon
Out now to tolerate no darkness more,
And saw right through the thing that tried to pass
For truth and solid, not an empty lie:
"So, he not only forged the words for her
But words for me, made letters he called mine:
What I sent, he retained, gave these in place,
All by the mistress-messenger! As I
Recognized her, at potency of truth,
So she, by the crystalline soul, knew me,
Never mistook the signs. Enough of this —
Let the wraith go to nothingness again,
Here is the orb, have only thought for her!"

"Thought?" nay, Sirs, what shall follow was not thought:
I have thought cometimes, and thought long and hard.
I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close,
As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar.
God and man, and what duty I owe both, —

I dare to say I have confronted these
In thought: but no such faculty helped here.
I put forth no thought, — powerless, all that night
I paced the city: it was the first Spring.
By the invasion I lay passive to,
In rushed new things, the old were rapt away;
Alike abolished — the imprisonment
Of the outside air, the inside weight o' the world
That pulled me down. Death meant, to spurn the ground,
Soar to the sky, — die well and you do that.
The very immolation made the bliss;
Death was the heart of life, and all the harm
My folly had crouched to avoid, now proved a veil
Hiding all gain my wisdom strove to grasp:
As if the intense centre of the flame
Should turn a heaven to that devoted fly
Which hitherto, sophist alike and sage,
Saint Thomas with his sober gray goose-quill,
And sinner Plato by Cephisian reed,
Would fain, pretending just the insect's good,
Whisk off, drive back, consign to shade again.
Into another state, under new rule
I knew myself was passing swift and sure;
Whereof the initiatory pang approached,
Felicitous annoy, as bitter-sweet
As when the virgin-band, the victors chaste,
Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,
And rise with something of a rosy shame
Into immortal nakedness: so I
Lay, and let come the proper throe would thrill
Into the ecstasy and outthrob pain.

I' the gray of dawn it was I found myself
Facing the pillared front o' the Pieve — mine,

My church: it seemed to say for the first time
"But am not I the Bride, the mystic love
O' the Lamb, who took thy plighted troth, my priest,
To fold thy warm heart on my heart of stone
And freeze thee nor unfasten any more?
This is a fleshly woman, — let the free
Bestow their life-blood, thou art pulseless now!"
See! Day by day I had risen and left this church
At the signal waved me by some foolish fan,
With half a curse and half a pitying smile
For the monk I stumbled over in my haste,
Prostrate and corpse-like at the altar-foot
Intent on his *corona:* then the church
Was ready with her quip, if word conduced,
To quicken my pace nor stop for prating — "There!
Be thankful you are no such ninny, go
Rather to teach a black-eyed novice cards
Than gabble Latin and protrude that nose
Smoothed to a sheep's through no brains and much faith!"
That sort of incentive! Now the church changed tone —
Now, when I found out first that life and death
Are means to an end, that passion uses both,
Indisputably mistress of the man
Whose form of worship is self-sacrifice:
Now, from the stone lungs sighed the scrannel voice
"Leave that live passion, come be dead with me!"
As if, i' the fabled garden, I had gone
On great adventure, plucked in ignorance
Hedge-fruit, and feasted to satiety,
Laughing at such high fame for hips and haws,
And scorned the achievement: then come all at once
O' the prize o' the place, the thing of perfect gold,

The apple's self: and, scarce my eye on that,
Was 'ware as well o' the seven-fold dragon's watch.

Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange, —
This new thing that had been struck into me
By the look o' the lady, — to dare disobey
The first authoritative word. 'T was God's.
I had been lifted to the level of her,
Could take such sounds into my sense. I said
"We two are cognisant o' the Master now;
She it is bids me bow the head: how true,
I am a priest! I see the function here;
I thought the other way self-sacrifice:
This is the true, seals up the perfect sum.
I pay it, sit down, silently obey."

So, I went home. Dawn broke, noon broadened, I —
I sat stone-still, let time run over me.
The sun slanted into my room, had reached
The west. I opened book, — Aquinas blazed
With one black name only on the white page.
I looked up, saw the sunset: vespers rang:
"She counts the minutes till I keep my word
And come say all is ready. I am a priest.
Duty to God is duty to her: I think
God, who created her, will save her too
Some new way, by one miracle the more,
Without me. Then, prayer may avail perhaps."
I went to my own place i' the Pieve, read
The office: I was back at home again
Sitting i' the dark. "Could she but know — but know
That, were there good in this distinct from God's,
Really good as it reached her, though procured
By a sin of mine, — I should sin: God forgives.

She knows it is no fear withholds me: fear?
Of what? Suspense here is the terrible thing.
If she should, as she counts the minutes, come
On the fantastic notion that I fear
The world now, fear the Archbishop, fear perhaps
Count Guido, he who, having forged the lies,
May wait the work, attend the effect, — I fear
The sword of Guido! Let God see to that —
Hating lies, let not her believe a lie!"

Again the morning found me. "I will work,
Tie down my foolish thoughts. Thank God so far!
I have saved her from a scandal, stopped the tongues
Had broken else into a cackle and hiss
Around the noble name. Duty is still
Wisdom: I have been wise." So the day wore.

At evening — "But, achieving victory,
I must not blink the priest's peculiar part,
Nor shrink to counsel, comfort: priest and friend —
How do we discontinue to be friends?
I will go minister, advise her seek
Help at the source, — above all, not despair:
There may be other happier help at hand.
I hope it, — wherefore then neglect to say?"

There she stood — leaned there, for the second time,
Over the terrace, looked at me, then spoke:
"Why is it you have suffered me to stay
Breaking my heart two days more than was need?
Why delay help, your own heart yearns to give?
You are again here, in the self-same mind,
I see here, steadfast in the face of you, —
You grudge to do no one thing that I ask.

Why then is nothing done? You know my need.
Still, through God's pity on me, there is time
And one day more: shall I be saved or no?"
I answered — "Lady, waste no thought, no word
Even to forgive me! Care for what I care —
Only! Now follow me as I were fate!
Leave this house in the dark to-morrow night,
Just before daybreak: — there 's new moon this eve —
It sets, and then begins the solid black.
Descend, proceed to the Torrione, step
Over the low dilapidated wall,
Take San Clemente, there 's no other gate
Unguarded at the hour: some paces thence
An inn stands; cross to it; I shall be there."

She answered, "If I can but find the way.
But I shall find it. Go now!"

I did go,
Took rapidly the route myself prescribed,
Stopped at Torrione, climbed the ruined place,
Proved that the gate was practicable, reached
The inn, no eye, despite the dark, could miss,
Knocked there and entered, made the host secure:
"With Caponsacchi it is ask and have;
I know my betters. Are you bound for Rome?
I get swift horse and trusty man," said he.

Then I retraced my steps, was found once more
In my own house for the last time: there lay
The broad pale opened Summa. "Shut his book,
There 's other showing! 'T was a Thomas too
Obtained, — more favored than his namesake here, —
A gift, tied faith fast, foiled the tug of doubt, —
Our Lady's girdle; down he saw it drop

As she ascended into heaven, they say:
He kept that safe and bade all doubt adieu.
I too have seen a lady and hold a grace."

I know not how the night passed: morning broke;
Presently came my servant. "Sir, this eve —
Do you forget?" I started. "How forget?
What is it you know?" "With due submission, Sir,
This being last Monday in the month but one
And a vigil, since to-morrow is Saint George,
And feast day, and moreover day for copes,
And Canon Conti now away a month,
And Canon Crispi sour because, forsooth,
You let him sulk in stall and bear the brunt
Of the octave . . . Well, Sir, 't is important!"
"True! Hearken, I have to start for Rome this night.
No word, lest Crispi overboil and burst!
Provide me with a laic dress! Throw dust
I' the Canon's eye, stop his tongue's scandal so!
See there 's a sword in case of accident."
I knew the knave, the knave knew me.

And thus
Through each familiar hindrance of the day
Did I make steadily for its hour and end, —
Felt time's old barrier-growth of right and fit
Give way through all its twines, and let me go.
Use and wont recognized the excepted man,
Let speed the special service, — and I sped
Till, at the dead between midnight and morn,
There was I at the goal, before the gate,
With a tune in the ears, low leading up to loud,
A light in the eyes, faint that would soon be flare,
Ever some spiritual witness new and new

In faster frequence, crowding solitude
To watch the way o' the warfare, — till, at last,
When the ecstatic minute must bring birth,
Began a whiteness in the distance, waxed
Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near,
Till it was she: there did Pompilia come:
The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,
Certainly, for the body was one black,
Black from head down to foot. She did not speak,
Glided into the carriage, — so a cloud
Gathers the moon up. "By San Spirito,
To Rome, as if the road burned underneath!
Reach Rome, then hold my head in pledge, I pay
The run and the risk to heart's content!" Just that
I said, — then, in another tick of time,
Sprang, was beside her, she and I alone.

So it began, our flight thro' dusk to clear,
Through day and night and day again to night
Once more, and to last dreadful dawn of all.
Sirs, how should I lie quiet in my grave
Unless you suffer me wring, drop by drop,
My brain dry, make a riddance of the drench
Of minutes with a memory in each,
Recorded motion, breath or look of hers,
Which poured forth would present you one pure glass,
Mirror you plain, — as God's sea, glassed in gold,
His saints, — the perfect soul Pompilia? Men,
You must know that a man gets drunk with truth
Stagnant inside him! Oh, they 've killed her, Sirs!
Can I be calm?
Calmly! Each incident
Proves, I maintain, that action of the flight
For the true thing it was. The first faint scratch

O' the stone will test its nature, teach its worth
To idiots who name Parian — coprolite.
After all, I shall give no glare — at best
Only display you certain scattered lights
Lamping the rush and roll of the abyss:
Nothing but here and there a fire-point pricks
Wavelet from wavelet: well!
For the first hour
We both were silent in the night, I know:
Sometimes I did not see nor understand.
Blackness engulfed me, — partial stupor, say —
Then I would break way, breathe through the surprise,
And be aware again, and see who sat
In the dark vest with the white face and hands.
I said to myself — "I have caught it, I conceive
The mind o' the mystery: 't is the way they wake
And wait, two martyrs somewhere in a tomb
Each by each as their blessing was to die,
Some signal they are promised and expect, —
When to arise before the trumpet scares:
So, through the whole course of the world they wait
The last day, but so fearless and so safe!
No otherwise, in safety and not fear,
I lie, because she lies too by my side."
You know this is not love, Sirs, — it is faith,
The feeling that there 's God, he reigns and rules
Out of this low world: that is all; no harm!
At times she drew a soft sigh — music seemed
Always to hover just above her lips,
Not settle, — break a silence music too.

In the determined morning, I first found
Her head erect, her face turned full to me,
Her soul intent on mine through two wide eyes.

I answered them. "You are saved hitherto.
We have passed Perugia, — gone round by the wood,
Not through, I seem to think, — and opposite
I know Assisi; this is holy ground."
Then she resumed. "How long since we both left
Arezzo?" "Years — and certain hours beside."

It was at . . . ah, but I forget the names!
'T is a mere post-house and a hovel or two;
I left the carriage and got bread and wine
And brought it her. "Does it detain to eat?"
"They stay perforce, change horses, — therefore eat!
We lose no minute: we arrive, be sure!"
This was — I know not where — there 's a great hill
Close over, and the stream has lost its bridge,
One fords it. She began — "I have heard say
Of some sick body that my mother knew,
'T was no good sign when in a limb diseased
All the pain suddenly departs, — as if
The guardian angel discontinued pain
Because the hope of cure was gone at last:
The limb will not again exert itself,
It needs be pained no longer: so with me,
— My soul whence all the pain is past at once:
All pain must be to work some good in the end.
True, this I feel now, this may be that good,
Pain was because of, — otherwise, I fear!"

She said, — a long while later in the day,
When I had let the silence be, — abrupt —
"Have you a mother?" "She died, I was born."
"A sister then?" "No sister." "Who was it —
What woman were you used to serve this way,
Be kind to, till I called you and you came?"

I did not like that word. Soon afterward —
"Tell me, are men unhappy, in some kind
Of mere unhappiness at being men,
As women suffer, being womanish?
Have you, now, some unhappiness, I mean,
Born of what may be man's strength overmuch,
To match the undue susceptibility,
The sense at every pore when hate is close?
It hurts us if a baby hides its face
Or child strikes at us punily, calls names
Or makes a mouth, — much more if stranger men
Laugh or frown, — just as that were much to bear!
Yet rocks split, — and the blow-ball does no more,
Quivers to feathery nothing at a touch;
And strength may have its drawback weakness 'scapes."

Once she asked "What is it that made you smile,
At the great gate with the eagles and the snakes,
Where the company entered, 't is a long time since?"
"— Forgive — I think you would not understand:
Ah, but you ask me, — therefore, it was this.
That was a certain bishop's villa-gate,
I knew it by the eagles, — and at once
Remembered this same bishop was just he
People of old were wont to bid me please
If I would catch preferment: so, I smiled
Because an impulse came to me, a whim —
What if I prayed the prelate leave to speak,
Began upon him in his presence-hall
— 'What, still at work so gray and obsolete?
Still rocheted and mitred more or less?
Don't you feel all that out of fashion now?
I find out when the day of things is done!'"

At eve we heard the *angelus:* she turned —
"I told you I can neither read nor write.
My life stopped with the play-time; I will learn,
If I begin to live again: but you —
Who are a priest — wherefore do you not read
The service at this hour? Read Gabriel's song,
The lesson, and then read the little prayer
To Raphael, proper for us travellers!"
I did not like that, neither, but I read.

When we stopped at Foligno it was dark.
The people of the post came out with lights:
The driver said, "This time to-morrow, may
Saints only help, relays continue good,
Nor robbers hinder, we arrive at Rome."
I urged, "Why tax your strength a second night?
Trust me, alight here and take brief repose!
We are out of harm's reach, past pursuit: go sleep
If but an hour! I keep watch, guard the while
Here in the doorway." But her whole face changed,
The misery grew again about her mouth,
The eyes burned up from faintness, like the fawn's
Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels
The probing spear o' the huntsman. "Oh, no stay!"
She cried, in the fawn's cry, "On to Rome, on, on
Unless 't is you who fear, — which cannot be!"

We did go on all night; but at its close
She was troubled, restless, moaned low, talked at whiles
To herself, her brow on quiver with the dream:
Once, wide awake, she menaced, at arms' length
Waved away something — "Never again with you!
My soul is mine, my body is my soul's:
You and I are divided ever more
In soul and body: get you gone!" Then I —

"Why, in my whole life I have never prayed!
Oh, if the God, that only can, would help!
Am I his priest with power to cast out fiends?
Let God arise and all his enemies
Be scattered!" By morn there was peace, no sigh
Out of the deep sleep.

When she woke at last,
I answered the first look — "Scarce twelve hours more,
Then, Rome! There probably was no pursuit,
There cannot now be peril: bear up brave!
Just some twelve hours to press through to the prize:
Then, no more of the terrible journey!" "Then,
No more o' the journey: if it might but last!
Always, my life-long, thus to journey still!
It is the interruption that I dread, —
With no dread, ever to be here and thus!
Never to see a face nor hear a voice!
Yours is no voice; you speak when you are dumb;
Nor face, I see it in the dark. I want
No face nor voice that change and grow unkind."
That I liked, that was the best thing she said.

In the broad day, I dared entreat, "Descend!"
I told a woman, at the garden-gate
By the post-house, white and pleasant in the sun,
"It is my sister, — talk with her apart!
She is married and unhappy, you perceive;
I take her home because her head is hurt;
Comfort her as you women understand!"
So, there I left them by the garden-wall,
Paced the road, then bade put the horses to,
Came back, and there she sat: close to her knee,
A black-eyed child still held the bowl of milk,
Wondered to see how little she could drink,

And in her arms the woman's infant lay.
She smiled at me "How much good this has done!
This is a whole night's rest and how much more!
I can proceed now, though I wish to stay.
How do you call that tree with the thick top
That holds in all its leafy green and gold
The sun now like an immense egg of fire?"
(It was a million-leaved mimosa.) "Take
The babe away from me and let me go!"
And in the carriage "Still a day, my friend!
And perhaps half a night, the woman fears.
I pray it finish since it cannot last:
There may be more misfortune at the close,
And where will you be? God suffice me then!"
And presently — for there was a roadside-shrine —
"When I was taken first to my own church
Lorenzo in Lucina, being a girl,
And bid confess my faults, I interposed
'But teach me what fault to confess and know!'
So, the priest said—'You should bethink yourself:
Each human being needs must have done wrong!'
Now, be you candid and no priest but friend—
Were I surprised and killed here on the spot,
A runaway from husband and his home,
Do you account it were in sin I died?
My husband used to seem to harm me, not . . .
Not on pretence he punished sin of mine,
Nor for sin's sake and lust of cruelty,
But as I heard him bid a farming-man
At the villa take a lamb once to the wood
And there ill-treat it, meaning that the wolf
Should hear its cries, and so come, quick be caught,
Enticed to the trap: he practised thus with me
That so, whatever were his gain thereby,

Others than I might become prey and spoil.
Had it been only between our two selves, —
His pleasure and my pain, — why, pleasure him
By dying, nor such need to make a coil!
But this was worth an effort, that my pain
Should not become a snare, prove pain threefold
To other people — strangers — or unborn —
How should I know? I sought release from that —
I think, or else from, — dare I say, some cause
Such as is put into a tree, which turns
Away from the north wind with what nest it holds, —
The woman said that trees so turn: now, friend,
Tell me, because I cannot trust myself!
You are a man: what have I done amiss?"
You must conceive my answer, — I forget —
Taken up wholly with the thought, perhaps,
This time she might have said, — might, did not say —
"You are a priest." She said, "my friend."
Day wore,
We passed the places, somehow the calm went,
Again the restless eyes began to rove
In new fear of the foe mine could not see.
She wandered in her mind, — addressed me once
"Gaetano!" — that is not my name: whose name?
I grew alarmed, my head seemed turning too.
I quickened pace with promise now, now threat:
Bade drive and drive, nor any stopping more.
"Too deep i' the thick of the struggle, struggle through!
Then drench her in repose though death's self pour
The plenitude of quiet, — help us, God,
Whom the winds carry!"
Suddenly I saw
The old tower, and the little white-walled clump
Of buildings and the cypress-tree or two, —

"Already Castelnuovo — Rome!" I cried,
"As good as Rome, — Rome is the next stage, think!
This is where travellers' hearts are wont to beat.
Say you are saved, sweet lady!" Up she woke.
The sky was fierce with color from the sun
Setting. She screamed out "No, I must not die!
Take me no farther, I should die: stay here!
I have more life to save than mine!"
She swooned.
We seemed safe: what was it foreboded so?
Out of the coach into the inn I bore
The motionless and breathless pure and pale
Pompilia, — bore her through a pitying group
And laid her on a couch, still calm and cured
By deep sleep of all woes at once. The host
Was urgent "Let her stay an hour or two!
Leave her to us, all will be right by morn!"
Oh, my foreboding! But I could not choose.

I paced the passage, kept watch all night long.
I listened, — not one movement, not one sigh.
"Fear not: she sleeps so sound!" they said: but I
Feared, all the same, kept fearing more and more,
Found myself throb with fear from head to foot,
Filled with a sense of such impending woe,
That, at first pause of night, pretence of gray,
I made my mind up it was morn. — "Reach Rome,
Lest hell reach her! A dozen miles to make,
Another long breath, and we emerge!" I stood
I' the court-yard, roused the sleepy grooms. "Have out
Carriage and horse, give haste, take gold!" said I.
While they made ready in the doubtful morn, —
'T was the last minute, — needs must I ascend
And break her sleep; I turned to go.

And there
Faced me Count Guido, there posed the mean man
As master, — took the field, encamped his rights,
Challenged the world : there leered new triumph, there
Scowled the old malice in the visage bad
And black o' the scamp. Soon triumph suppled the tongue
A little, malice glued to his dry throat,
And he part howled, part hissed . . . oh, how he kept
Well out o' the way, at arm's length and to spare ! —
" My salutation to your priestship ! What ?
Matutinal, busy with book so soon
Of an April day that 's damp as tears that now
Deluge Arezzo at its darling's flight ? —
'T is unfair, wrongs feminity at large,
To let a single dame monopolize
A heart the whole sex claims, should share alike :
Therefore I overtake you, Canon ! Come !
The lady, — could you leave her side so soon ?
You have not yet experienced at her hands
My treatment, you lay down undrugged, I see !
Hence this alertness — hence no death-in-life
Like what held arms fast when she stole from mine.
To be sure, you took the solace and repose
That first night at Foligno ! — news abound
O' the road by this time, — men regaled me much,
As past them I came halting after you,
Vulcan pursuing Mars, as poets sing, —
Still at the last here pant I, but arrive,
Vulcan — and not without my Cyclops too,
The Commissary and the unpoisoned arm
O' the Civil Force, should Mars turn mutineer.
Enough of fooling : capture the culprits, friend !
Here is the lover in the smart disguise
With the sword, — he is a priest, so mine lies still.

There upstairs hides my wife the runaway,
His leman: the two plotted, poisoned first,
Plundered me after, and eloped thus far
Where now you find them. Do your duty quick!
Arrest and hold him! That 's done: now catch her!"
During this speech of that man, — well, I stood
Away, as he managed, — still, I stood as near
The throat of him, with these two hands, my own, —
As now I stand near yours, Sir, — one quick spring,
One great good satisfying gripe, and lo!
There had he lain abolished with his lie,
Creation purged o' the miscreate, man redeemed,
A spittle wiped off from the face of God!
I, in some measure, seek a poor excuse
For what I left undone, in just this fact
That my first feeling at the speech I quote
Was — not of what a blasphemy was dared,
Not what a bag of venomed purulence
Was split and noisome, — but how splendidly
Mirthful, how ludicrous a lie was launched!
Would Molière's self wish more than hear such man
Call, claim such woman for his own, his wife,
Even though, in due amazement at the boast,
He had stammered, she moreover was divine?
She to be his, — were hardly less absurd
Than that he took her name into his mouth,
Licked, and then let it go again, the beast,
Signed with his slaver. Oh, she poisoned him,
Plundered him, and the rest! Well, what I wished
Was, that he would but go on, say once more
So to the world, and get his meed of men,
The fist's reply to the filth. And while I mused,
The minute, oh the misery, was gone!
On either idle hand of me there stood

Really an officer, nor laughed i' the least:
Nay, rendered justice to his reason, laid
Logic to heart, as 't were submitted them
"'Twice two makes four."
"And now, catch her!" he cried.
That sobered me. "Let myself lead the way — 1480
Ere you arrest me, who am somebody,
Being, as you hear, a priest and privileged, —
To the lady's chamber! I presume you — men
Expert, instructed how to find out truth,
Familiar with the guise of guilt. Detect
Guilt on her face when it meets mine, then judge
Between us and the mad dog howling there!"
Up we all went together, in they broke
O' the chamber late my chapel. There she lay,
Composed as when I laid her, that last eve, 1490
O' the couch, still breathless, motionless, sleep's self,
Wax-white, seraphic, saturate with the sun
O' the morning that now flooded from the front
And filled the window with a light like blood.
"Behold the poisoner, the adulteress,
— And feigning sleep too! Seize, bind!" Guido hissed.

She started up, stood erect, face to face
With the husband: back he fell, was buttressed there
By the window all a-flame with morning-red,
He the black figure, the opprobrious blur 1500
Against all peace and joy and light and life.
"Away from between me and hell!" she cried:
"Hell for me, no embracing any more!
I am God's, I love God, God — whose knees I clasp,
Whose utterly most just award I take,
But bear no more love-making devils: hence!"
I may have made an effort to reach her side

From where I stood i' the door-way, — anyhow
I found the arms, I wanted, pinioned fast,
Was powerless in the clutch to left and right
O' the rabble pouring in, rascality
Enlisted, rampant on the side of hearth
Home and the husband, — pay in prospect too!
They heaped themselves upon me. "Ha! — and him
Also you outrage? Him, too, my sole friend,
Guardian and saviour? That I balk you of,
Since — see how God can help at last and worst!"
She sprang at the sword that hung beside him, seized,
Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy
O' the blade, "Die," cried she, "devil, in God's name!"
Ah, but they all closed round her, twelve to one
— The unmanly men, no woman-mother made,
Spawned somehow! Dead-white and disarmed she lay.
No matter for the sword, her word sufficed
To spike the coward through and through: he shook,
Could only spit between the teeth — "You see?
You hear? Bear witness, then! Write down . . . but no —
Carry these criminals to the prison-house,
For first thing! I begin my search meanwhile
After the stolen effects, gold, jewels, plate,
Money and clothes, they robbed me of and fled,
With no few amorous pieces, verse and prose,
I have much reason to expect to find."

When I saw that — no more than the first mad speech,
Made out the speaker mad and a laughing-stock,
So neither did this next device explode
One listener's indignation, — that a scribe
Did sit down, set himself to write indeed,

While sundry knaves began to peer and pry
In corner and hole, — that Guido, wiping brow
And getting him a countenance, was fast
Losing his fear, beginning to strut free
O' the stage of his exploit, snuff here, sniff there, —
Then I took truth in, guessed sufficiently
The service for the moment. "What I say,
Slight at your peril! We are aliens here,
My adversary and I, called noble both;
I am the nobler, and a name men know.
I could refer our cause to our own Court
In our own country, but prefer appeal
To the nearer jurisdiction. Being a priest,
Though in a secular garb, — for reasons good
I shall adduce in due time to my peers, —
I demand that the Church I serve, decide
Between us, right the slandered lady there.
A Tuscan noble, I might claim the Duke:
A priest, I rather choose the Church, — bid Rome
Cover the wronged with her inviolate shield."

There was no refusing this: they bore me off,
They bore her off, to separate cells o' the same
Ignoble prison, and, separate, thence to Rome.
Pompilia's face, then and thus, looked on me
The last time in this life: not one sight since,
Never another sight to be! And yet
I thought I had saved her. I appealed to Rome:
It seems I simply sent her to her death.
You tell me she is dying now, or dead;
I cannot bring myself to quite believe
This is a place you torture people in:
What if this your intelligence were just
A subtlety, an honest wile to work

On a man at unawares? 'T were worthy you.
No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead!
That erect form, flashing brow, fulgurant eye,
That voice immortal (oh, that voice of hers!)
That vision in the blood-red daybreak — that
Leap to life of the pale electric sword
Angels go armed with, — that was not the last
O' the lady! Come, I see through it, you find —
Know the manœuvre! Also herself said
I had saved her: do you dare say she spoke false?
Let me see for myself if it be so!
Though she were dying, a Priest might be of use,
The more when he 's a friend too, — she called me
Far beyond "friend." Come, let me see her — indeed
It is my duty, being a priest: I hope
I stand confessed, established, proved a priest?
My punishment had motive that, a priest
I, in a laic garb, a mundane mode,
Did what were harmlessly done otherwise.
I never touched her with my finger-tip
Except to carry her to the couch, that eve,
Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,
As we priests carry the paten: that is why
— To get leave and go see her of your grace —
I have told you this whole story over again.
Do I deserve grace? For I might lock lips,
Laugh at your jurisdiction: what have you
To do with me in the matter? I suppose
You hardly think I donned a bravo's dress
To have a hand in the new crime; on the old,
Judgment's delivered, penalty imposed,
I was chained fast at Civita hand and foot —
She had only you to trust to, you and Rome,
Rome and the Church, and no pert meddling priest

Two days ago, when Guido, with the right,
Hacked her to pieces. One might well be wroth ;
I have been patient, done my best to help :
I come from Civita and punishment
As friend of the Court — and for pure friendship's sake
Have told my tale to the end, — nay, not the end —
For, wait — I 'll end — not leave you that excuse!

When we were parted, — shall I go on there ?
I was presently brought to Rome — yes, here I stood
Opposite yonder very crucifix —
And there sat you and you, Sirs, quite the same.
I heard charge, and bore question, and told tale
Noted down in the book there, — turn and see
If, by one jot or tittle, I vary now !
I' the color the tale takes, there 's change perhaps ;
'T is natural, since the sky is different,
Eclipse in the air now ; still, the outline stays.
I showed you how it came to be my part
To save the lady. Then your clerk produced
Papers, a pack of stupid and impure
Banalities called letters about love —
Love, indeed, — I could teach who styled them so,
Better, I think, though priest and loveless both !
" — How was it that a wife, young, innocent,
And stranger to your person, wrote this page ? " —
" — She wrote it when the Holy Father wrote
The bestiality that posts thro' Rome,
Put in his mouth by Pasquin." " Nor perhaps
Did you return these answers, verse and prose,
Signed, sealed and sent the lady ? There 's your hand ! "
" — This precious piece of verse, I really judge,
Is meant to copy my own character,
A clumsy mimic ; and this other prose,

Not so much even; both rank forgery:
Verse, quotha? Bembo's verse! When Saint John wrote
The tract 'De Tribus,' I wrote this to match."
"— How came it, then, the documents were found
At the inn on your departure?" — "I opine,
Because there were no documents to find
In my presence, — you must hide before you find.
Who forged them hardly practised in my view;
Who found them waited till I turned my back."
"— And what of the clandestine visits paid,
Nocturnal passage in and out the house
With its lord absent? 'T is alleged you climbed . . ."
"— Flew on a broomstick to the man i' the moon!
Who witnessed or will testify this trash?"
"— The trusty servant, Margherita's self,
Even she who brought you letters, you confess,
And, you confess, took letters in reply:
Forget not we have knowledge of the facts!"
"— Sirs, who have knowledge of the facts, defray
The expenditure of wit I waste in vain,
Trying to find out just one fact of all!
She who brought letters from who could not write,
And took back letters to who could not read, —
Who was that messenger, of your charity?"
"— Well, so far favors you the circumstance
That this same messenger . . . how shall we say? . . .
Sub imputatione meretricis
Laborat, — which makes accusation null:
We waive this woman's: naught makes void the next.
Borsi, called Venerino, he who drove,
O' the first night when you fled away, at length
Deposes to your kissings in the coach,
— Frequent, frenetic . . ." "When deposed he so?"
"After some weeks of sharp imprisonment . . ."

"— Granted by friend the Governor, I engage —"
"— For his participation in your flight!
At length his obduracy melting made
The avowal mentioned. . . ." "Was dismissed forthwith
To liberty, poor knave, for recompense.
Sirs, give what credit to the lie you can!
For me, no word in my defence I speak,
And God shall argue for the lady!"
So
Did I stand question, and make answer, still
With the same result of smiling disbelief,
Polite impossibility of faith
In such affected virtue in a priest;
But a showing fair play, an indulgence, even,
To one no worse than others after all —
Who had not brought disgrace to the order, played
Discreetly, ruffled gown nor ripped the cloth
In a bungling game at romps: I have told you, Sirs —
If I pretended simply to be pure,
Honest and Christian in the case, — absurd!
As well go boast myself above the needs
O' the human nature, careless how meat smells,
Wine tastes, — a saint above the smack! But once
Abate my crest, own flaws i' the flesh, agree
To go with the herd, be hog no more nor less,
Why, hogs in common herd have common rights:
I must not be unduly borne upon,
Who just romanced a little, sowed wild oats,
But 'scaped without a scandal, flagrant fault.
My name helped to a mirthful circumstance:
"Joseph" would do well to amend his plea:
Undoubtedly — some toying with the wife,
But as for ruffian violence and rape,

Potiphar pressed too much on the other side!
The intrigue, the elopement, the disguise, — well charged!
The letters and verse looked hardly like the truth.
Your apprehension was — of guilt enough
To be compatible with innocence,
So, punished best a little and not too much.
Had I struck Guido Franceschini's face,
You had counselled me withdraw for my own sake,
Balk him of bravo-hiring. Friends came round,
Congratulated, "Nobody mistakes!
The pettiness o' the forfeiture defines
The peccadillo: Guido gets his share:
His wife is free of husband and hook-nose,
The mouldy viands and the mother-in-law.
To Civita with you and amuse the time,
Travesty us '*De Raptu Helenæ!*'
A funny figure must the husband cut
When the wife makes him skip, — too ticklish, eh?
Do it in Latin, not the Vulgar, then!
Scazons — we 'll copy and send his Eminence.
Mind — one iambus in the final foot!
He 'll rectify it, be your friend for life!"
Oh, Sirs, depend on me for much new light
Thrown on the justice and religion here
By this proceeding, much fresh food for thought!

And I was just set down to study these
In relegation, two short days ago,
Admiring how you read the rules, when, clap,
A thunder comes into my solitude —
I am caught up in a whirlwind and cast here,
Told of a sudden, in this room where so late
You dealt out law adroitly, that those scales,

I meekly bowed to, took my allotment from,
Guido has snatched at, broken in your hands,
Metes to himself the murder of his wife,
Full measure, pressed down, running over now!
Can I assist to an explanation? — Yes,
I rise in your esteem, sagacious Sirs,
Stand up a renderer of reasons, not
The officious priest would personate Saint George
For a mock Princess in undragoned days.
What, the blood startles you? What, after all
The priest who needs must carry sword on thigh
May find imperative use for it? Then, there was
A Princess, was a dragon belching flame,
And should have been a Saint George also? Then,
There might be worse schemes than to break the bonds
At Arezzo, lead her by the little hand,
Till she reached Rome, and let her try to live?
But you were law and gospel, — would one please
Stand back, allow your faculty elbow-room?
You blind guides who must needs lead eyes that see!
Fools, alike ignorant of man and God!
What was there here should have perplexed your wit
For a wink of the owl-eyes of you? How miss, then,
What 's now forced on you by this flare of fact —
As if Saint Peter failed to recognize
Nero as no apostle, John or James,
Till someone burned a martyr, made a torch
O' the blood and fat to show his features by!
Could you fail read this cartulary aright
On head and front of Franceschini there,
Large-lettered like hell's masterpiece of print, —
That he, from the beginning pricked at heart
By some lust, letch of hate against his wife,
Plotted to plague her into overt sin

And shame, would slay Pompilia body and soul,
And save his mean self — miserably caught
I' the quagmire of his own tricks, cheats and lies?
— That himself wrote those papers, — from himself
To himself, — which, i' the name of me and her,
His mistress-messenger gave her and me,
Touching us with such pustules of the soul
That she and I might take the taint, be shown
To the world and shuddered over, speckled so?
— That the agent put her sense into my words,
Made substitution of the thing she hoped,
For the thing she had and held, its opposite,
While the husband in the background bit his lips
At each fresh failure of his precious plot?
— That when at the last we did rush each on each,
By no chance but because God willed it so —
The spark of truth was struck from out our souls —
Made all of me, descried in the first glance,
Seem fair and honest and permissible love
O' the good and true — as the first glance told me
There was no duty patent in the world
Like daring try be good and true myself,
Leaving the shows of things to the Lord of Show
And Prince o' the Power of the Air. Our very flight,
Even to its most ambiguous circumstance,
Irrefragably proved how futile, false . . .
Why, men — men and not boys — boys and not babes —
Babes and not beasts — beasts and not stocks and stones! —
Had the liar's lie been true one pin-point speck,
Were I the accepted suitor, free o' the place,
Disposer of the time, to come at a call
And go at a wink as who should say me nay, —

What need of flight, what were the gain therefrom
But just damnation, failure or success?
Damnation pure and simple to her the wife
And me the priest — who bartered private bliss
For public reprobation, the safe shade
For the sunshine which men see to pelt me by:
What other advantage, — we who led the days
And nights alone i' the house, — was flight to find?
In our whole journey did we stop an hour,
Diverge a foot from straight road till we reached
Or would have reached — but for that fate of ours —
The father and mother, in the eye of Rome,
The eye of yourselves we made aware of us
At the first fall of misfortune? And indeed
You did so far give sanction to our flight,
Confirm its purpose, as lend helping hand,
Deliver up Pompilia not to him
She fled, but those the flight was ventured for.
Why then could you, who stopped short, not go on
One poor step more, and justify the means,
Having allowed the end? — not see and say
"Here's the exceptional conduct that should claim
To be exceptionally judged on rules
Which, understood, make no exception here" —
Why play instead into the devil's hands
By dealing so ambiguously as gave
Guido the power to intervene like me,
Prove one exception more? I saved his wife
Against law: against law he slays her now:
Deal with him!

I have done with being judged.
I stand here guiltless in thought, word and deed,
To the point that I apprise you, — in contempt

For all misapprehending ignorance
O' the human heart, much more the mind of Christ, —
That I assuredly did bow, was blessed
By the revelation of Pompilia. There!
Such is the final fact I fling you, Sirs,
To mouth and mumble and misinterpret: there!
"The priest 's in love," have it the vulgar way!
Unpriest me, rend the rags o' the vestment, do —
Degrade deep, disenfranchise all you dare —
Remove me from the midst, no longer priest
And fit companion for the like of you —
Your gay Abati with the well-turned leg
And rose i' the hat-rim, Canons, cross at neck
And silk mask in the pocket of the gown,
Brisk Bishops with the world's musk still unbrushed
From the rochet; I 'll no more of these good things:
There 's a crack somewhere, something that 's unsound
I' the rattle!

For Pompilia — be advised,
Build churches, go pray! You will find me there,
I know, if you come, — and you will come, I know.
Why, there 's a Judge weeping! Did not I say
You were good and true at bottom? You see the truth —
I am glad I helped you: she helped me just so.

But for Count Guido, — you must counsel there!
I bow my head, bend to the very dust,
Break myself up in shame of faultiness.
I had him one whole moment, as I said —
As I remember, as will never out
O' the thoughts of me, — I had him in arm's reach
There, — as you stand, Sir, now you cease to sit, —
I could have killed him ere he killed his wife,
And did not: he went off alive and well

And then effected this last feat — through me!
Me—not through you—dismiss that fear! 'T was you
Hindered me staying here to save her, — not
From leaving you and going back to him
And doing service in Arezzo. Come,
Instruct me in procedure! I conceive —
In all due self-abasement might I speak —
How you will deal with Guido: oh, not death!
Death, if it let her life be: otherwise
Not death, — your lights will teach you clearer! I
Certainly have an instinct of my own
I' the matter: bear with me and weigh its worth!
Let us go away — leave Guido all alone
Back on the world again that knows him now!
I think he will be found (indulge so far!)
Not to die so much as slide out of life,
Pushed by the general horror and common hate
Low, lower, — left o' the very ledge of things,
I seem to see him catch convulsively
One by one at all honest forms of life,
At reason, order, decency and use —
To cramp him and get foothold by at least;
And still they disengage them from his clutch.
"What, you are he, then, had Pompilia once
And so forewent her? Take not up with us!"
And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
Aspiring to be immortality,
As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,
Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down
Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth
Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale:
So I lose Guido in the loneliness,
Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end,

At the horizontal line, creation's verge,
From what just is to absolute nothingness —
Whom is it, straining onward still, he meets?
What other man deep further in the fate,
Who, turning at the prize of a footfall
To flatter him and promise fellowship,
Discovers in the act a frightful face —
Judas, made monstrous by much solitude!
The two are at one now! Let them love their love
That bites and claws like hate, or hate their hate
That mops and mows and makes as it were love!
There, let them each tear each in devil's-fun,
Or fondle this the other while malice aches —
Both teach, both learn detestability!
Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot! Pay that back,
That smatch o' the slaver blistering on your lip,
By the better trick, the insult he spared Christ —
Lure him the lure o' the letters, Aretine!
Lick him o'er slimy-smooth with jelly-filth
O' the verse-and-prose pollution in love's guise!
The cockatrice is with the basilisk!
There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,
Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,
In their one spot out of the ken of God
Or care of man, for ever and ever more!

Why, Sirs, what 's this? Why, this is sorry and strange!
Futility, divagation: this from me
Bound to be rational, justify an act
Of sober man! — whereas, being moved so much,
I give you cause to doubt the lady's mind:
A pretty sarcasm for the world! I fear
You do her wit injustice, — all through me!
Like my fate all through, — ineffective help!

A poor rash advocate I prove myself.
You might be angry with good cause: but sure
At the advocate, — only at the undue zeal
That spoils the force of his own plea, I think?
My part was just to tell you how things stand,
State facts and not be flustered at their fume.
But then 't is a priest speaks: as for love, — no!
If you let buzz a vulgar fly like that
About your brains, as if I loved, forsooth,
Indeed, Sirs, you do wrong! We had no thought
Of such infatuation, she and I:
There are many points that prove it: do be just!
I told you, — at one little roadside-place
I spent a good half-hour, paced to and fro
The garden; just to leave her free awhile,
I plucked a handful of Spring herb and bloom:
I might have sat beside her on the bench
Where the children were: I wish the thing had been,
Indeed: the event could not be worse, you know:
One more half-hour of her saved! She 's dead now, Sirs!
While I was running on at such a rate,
Friends should have plucked me by the sleeve: I went
Too much o' the trivial outside of her face
And the purity that shone there — plain to me,
Not to you, what more natural? Nor am I
Infatuated, — oh, I saw, be sure!
Her brow had not the right line, leaned too much,
Painters would say; they like the straight-up Greek:
This seemed bent somewhat with an invisible crown
Of martyr and saint, not such as art approves.
And how the dark orbs dwelt deep underneath,
Looked out of such a sad sweet heaven on me!
The lips, compressed a little, came forward too,
Careful for a whole world of sin and pain.

That was the face, her husband makes his plea,
He sought just to disfigure, — no offence
Beyond that! Sirs, let us be rational!
He needs must vindicate his honor, — ay,
Yet shirks, the coward, in a clown's disguise,
Away from the scene, endeavors to escape.
Now, had he done so, slain and left no trace
O' the slayer, — what were vindicated, pray?
You had found his wife disfigured or a corpse,
For what and by whom? It is too palpable!
Then, here 's another point involving law:
I use this argument to show you meant
No calumny against us by that title
O' the sentence, — liars try to twist it so:
What penalty it bore, I had to pay
Till further proof should follow of innocence —
Probationis ob defectum, — proof?
How could you get proof without trying us?
You went through the preliminary form,
Stopped there, contrived this sentence to amuse
The adversary. If the title ran
For more than fault imputed and not proved,
That was a simple penman's error, else
A slip i' the phrase, — as when we say of you
"Charged with injustice" — which may either be
Or not be, — 't is a name that sticks meanwhile.
Another relevant matter: fool that I am!
Not what I wish true, yet a point friends urge:
It is not true, — yet, since friends think it helps, —
She only tried me when some others failed —
Began with Conti, whom I told you of,
And Guillichini, Guido's kinsfolk both,
And when abandoned by them, not before,
Turned to me. That 's conclusive why she turned.

Much good they got by the happy cowardice !
Conti is dead, poisoned a month ago :
Does that much strike you as a sin ? Not much,
After the present murder, — one mark more
On the Moor's skin, — what is black by blacker still ?
Conti had come here and told truth. And so
With Guillichini ; he 's condemned of course
To the galleys, as a friend in this affair,
Tried and condemned for no one thing i' the world,
A fortnight since by who but the Governor ? —
The just judge, who refused Pompilia help
At first blush, being her husband's friend, you know.
There are two tales to suit the separate courts,
Arezzo and Rome : he tells you here, we fled
Alone, unhelped, — lays stress on the main fault,
The spiritual sin, Rome looks to : but elsewhere
He likes best we should break in, steal, bear off,
Be fit to brand and pillory and flog —
That 's the charge goes to the heart of the Governor :
If these unpriest me, you and I may yet
Converse, Vincenzo Marzi-Medici !
Oh, Sirs, there are worse men than you, I say !
More easily duped, I mean ; this stupid lie,
Its liar never dared propound in Rome,
He gets Arezzo to receive, — nay more,
Gets Florence and the Duke to authorize !
This is their Rota's sentence, their Granduke
Signs and seals ! Rome for me henceforward — Rome,
Where better men are, — most of all, that man
The Augustinian of the Hospital,
Who writes the letter, — he confessed, he says,
Many a dying person, never one
So sweet and true and pure and beautiful.
A good man ! Will you make him Pope one day ?

Not that he is not good too, this we have —
But old, — else he would have his word to speak,
His truth to teach the world : I thirst for truth,
But shall not drink it till I reach the source.

Sirs, I am quiet again. You see, we are
So very pitiable, she and I,
Who had conceivably been otherwise.
Forget distemperature and idle heat!
Apart from truth's sake, what 's to move so much ?
Pompilia will be presently with God;
I am, on earth, as good as out of it,
A relegated priest; when exile ends,
I mean to do my duty and live long.
She and I are mere strangers now : but priests
Should study passion ; how else cure mankind,
Who come for help in passionate extremes?
I do but play with an imagined life
Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblessed
By the higher call, — since you will have it so, —
Leads it companioned by the woman there.
To live, and see her learn, and learn by her,
Out of the low obscure and petty world —
Or only see one purpose and one will
Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right:
To have to do with nothing but the true,
The good, the eternal — and these, not alone
In the main current of the general life,
But small experiences of every day,
Concerns of the particular hearth and home :
To learn not only by a comet's rush
But a rose's birth, — not by the grandeur, God —
But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!
Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream !—

Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place
Of Roman, Grecian; draws the patched gown close,
Dreams, "Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!"—
Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes
To the old solitary nothingness.
So I, from such communion, pass content . . .

O great, just, good God! Miserable me!

NOTES.

Book I. — The Ring and the Book.

Line 1. *Ring:* Mrs. Browning owned such a ring. After her death the poet always wore it on his watch-chain. It is now in the possession of their son.

2. *Imitative craft:* the elder Castellani, Fortunato Piso (d. 1865), founder of the house of Roman jewellers and antiquarians of that name, opened a studio in 1826, about the same time that so many antique jewels were unearthed in Etruria. He turned his attention especially to the rediscovery of the chemical and mechanical processes known and used by ancient workers in very pure gold, and was successful in reproducing many antique effects.

6. *Chiusi:* the ancient Clusium of Lars Porsenna, capital of Etruria, 88 miles from Florence. To the east of the modern city is a slope called the Jewellers' Field (*Campo degli Orefici*) from the relics brought to light there, rarely as the produce of the tombs or of systematic search, but of accidental discovery, especially after heavy rains.

22. *Repristination*; restoration to its earlier nature.

32. *Book:* the original is now in the Library of Balliol College, Oxford.

44. *Baccio's marble:* the statue of Giovanni delle Bande Nere (John of the Black Bands, father of Cosimo de' Medici), by Baccio Bandinelli, in the Piazza San Lorenzo, between the Palazzo Riccardi (the palace of the Medici) and the church of San Lorenzo.

57. *Breccia:* bits of stone from broken walls.

64. *Scagliola:* marble or stone flooring.

65. *Two crazie:* about 1½ *d.*

68. *The imaginative Sienese:* Ademollo (see l. 364).

72. *Joconde:* the portrait of Mona Lisa Gioconda, by Leonardo da Vinci, in the Louvre.

76. *Spicilegium:* a book of selections made from the best writers.

77. *The Frail One of the Flower:* La Dame aux Camélias.

102. *Festas:* feast days.

162. *Fisc: i. e.* Counsel for the Treasury, or Public Prosecutor.

219. *Solon,* etc.: Solon's laws about women "were of the strangest," says Plutarch, for death, heavy fines, and small fines were all permissible penalties in cases of adultery.

220. *Code of Romulus:* the code of the founder of Rome, as given by Plutarch, forbade a wife to leave her husband, but granted a husband power to turn off a wife for counterfeiting his keys, or for adultery. — *Justinian:* the Roman emperor (530–564) upon whose Pandects, 529–533, later European law was based.

221. *Baldo:* an eminent professor of civil law, also of canon law, born in 1327. — *Bartolo:* an erudite Italian jurist (1313–1356) associated with the Emperor Charles V. in codifying laws. To him is attributed the "Bulle d'Or," the charter of the German constitution.

223. *Cornelia de Sicariis, Pompeia de Parricidiis:* the titles of Roman laws dealing with homicide and adultery.

226. *Solomon confirmed Paul:* Ecc. vii. 25; 1 Cor. vii. 39, xi. 3, 9; Rom. vii. 2.

227. *Decision of Dolabella:* see VIII. 913.

228. *Instance of Theodoric:* the Ostrogoth, in letters (Variæ Epistolæ) written for him by Cassiodorus: "For even brute beasts vindicate their conjugal rights by force; how much more man who is so deeply dishonored," etc.

229. *Ælian:* "De Animalium Natura," xi. 15.

260. *Presbyter,* etc.: the names of successive orders in

the Roman Church, of which the minor ones can be assumed without causing the holder to cease to be a layman; thus (a point of importance in Count Guido's case) they do not prevent him from marrying, yet they are sufficient to entitle him to appeal to the Pope, as head of the Church.

280. *Ghetto:* the Jews' quarter of the city.

293. *Herodotus: e. g.* the stories of Crœsus or of Xerxes.

296. *The Pope*: Innocent XII., pope from 1691–1700.

303. *Molinists:* followers of Miguel Molinos, a Spaniard, who published at Rome in 1675 a work of mystical or "quietistic" theology, entitled the *Guida Spirituale* or Spiritual Guide, which attracted much attention, but was declared heretical by the heads of the Church. Allusions to the orthodox dislike or dread of Molinism at this time recur frequently in this poem.

315. *Nepotism:* favoritism to relations.

320. *Carlines:* a small silver coin, worth about twopence.

354. *Obelisk:* brought from Egypt by Augustus, and placed in the Circus Maximus, whence, having fallen down, it was removed by Pope Sixtus V. in 1589, and set up in the Piazza del Popolo, below the Monte Pincio.

426. *Diario:* daily paper.

439. *Manning*, etc.: distinguished modern prelates and champions of the Roman Catholic Church.

453. *Lingot:* the same word as ingot; here = the solid mass of truth.

461. *Djereed:* an Arab spear. The allusion is to a game analogous to tilting at a ring.

484. *Gold snow*, etc.: as the Rhodians were the first who offered sacrifices to Minerva, Jove rewarded them by covering the island with a golden cloud from which he sent showers of presents upon the people.

489. *Datura:* thorn-apple = stramonium.

499. *Arezzo:* in Tuscany, about 40 miles southeast of Florence.

670. *Abacus:* the upper part of the capital of a pillar on which the architrave rests. In its earliest forms it is generally square in shape.

696. *Malleolable:* formed from the Latin, *malleolus*, a little hammer.

860. *Æacus:* the colleague of Minos and Rhadamanthus as judge of the nether world; hence a type of impartiality.

890. *Old Triton:* fountain in the great square of the Barberini palace, palace and fountain both by Bernini, celebrated sculptor and architect, 1598–1680.

908. *Tertium quid:* a third something.

927. *Girandole:* a dance.

972. *Vigil-torture:* which kept the accused from sleep, said to be invented by Marsiliis, a jurist of Bologna, and called by him *cordis dolorem.*

1022. *Lutanist:* player on the lute.

1145. *Levigate:* make light of.

1201. *Clavecinist:* a player on the harpsichord.

1204. *Rondo:* a form of composition in which the theme is repeated and developed according to certain rules. Often used as the final movement of a sonata or suite.

1206. *Corelli:* Arcangelo, violin virtuoso and composer, 1652–1713. — *Haendel:* celebrated composer, 1685–1759.

1231. *Lathen:* probably meant for *latten*, a fine kind of brass or bronze used in the Middle Ages for crosses and candlesticks.

1271. *Rivelled:* shrank up.

1303. *Brotherhood of Death:* the confraternity of the Misericordia, or brothers of mercy, who prepare criminals for death, and attend funerals as an act of charity.

1320. *Mannaia:* a kind of guillotine.

1339. *Holpen:* old form, past participle of help.

1382. *Posy:* a contraction for "poesy," a love-verse or motto inscribed on a ring. The "posy" written in the poet's ring of verse is a lyric dedicated to Elizabeth Bar-

rett Browning. The first twelve lines (1383–1394) are ejaculatory, and all one with the opening exclamatory address, as thus: O lyric Love, thou who art this, and this, and all this, and yet wert human when the test of earthly life came, this voice of mine being the same you knew when on earth, and change being impossible to thy soul, hail thou, and hear, thou who art now no longer on earth, but above in "the realms of help"! This vocative description may be made to yield its rich implications in bald words still further, thus: She was "half angel," or creature of heaven, "half bird," or creature of song; and all made up of wonder and untamable aspiration. She was the boldest of all hearts that ever lived, or died, or loved and labored; that ever "braved the sun," *i. e.* lived and faced the daily light of earth; that ever "took sanctuary," etc., *i. e.* penetrated through life or death to a refuge in the ideal and undying life of the spirit; that ever "sang a kindred soul out to his face," *i. e.* confronted a mate with an equal outpouring of love and song. (This expression recalls the passages in Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese":—

> "When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
> Face to face," — xxii.

and

> ". . . Thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall,
> When the sob took it, thy divinest art's
> Own instrument didst drop down at thy foot,
> To hearken what I said between my tears,
> Instruct me how to thank thee! — Oh, to shoot
> My soul's full meaning into future years,
> That they should lend its utterance, and salute
> Love that endures." —xi.)

Yet she was human when the summons to be earth-born came to her ethereal spirit and to take upon herself all that earthly life involves both in her own personal life and love or in the general life of men. (This recalls Mrs. Browning's abandonment of her invalid's cham-

ber for marriage and life. As she herself said in Sonnet xxxiii., —

> "I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange
> My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee!"

It calls to mind, also, her life-long interest in Italian politics and in popular liberty.) In the remaining lines (1395-1408) the poet declares that he may never begin his song, which is his due to God, who best taught him to be a poet through giving him his poet-wife, without bowed head and hand outstretched in pleading for the old communion of soul with her who is now no longer on earth beside him; nor may he ever conclude his song without lifting hand and head in aspiration to the utmost, up and on, toward where she is and he cannot reach; yet, where he ever looks for all hope, sustainment, and reward; and so, by that act of aspiration up and on toward her, may bear to her where she stands glorified in heaven an answering happiness — blessing back the vague whiteness where he thinks he may discern the shining reflex of her face, and the floating wanness where, as on a cloud, her footing may rest. (See also "Introductory Essay," p. xxxv.) Other interpretations than those here offered of lines 1385-1392 have been given by Dr. F. J. Furnivall. He understood lines 1385-1387 to mean "that the dead Poetess, when she soared into the blue, sang out to *the sun* her soul which was akin to his, as life-giving, as pure, as bright," and again, that lines 1388-1392 contrast "the Poetess's humanity *at her death*" with the description of her in line 1383.

"The two difficulties," says Dr. Furnivall, "lie in the 4-line adverb of time (1389-1392), 'When the first summons,' and the $3\frac{1}{2}$-line adverb of purpose (1405-8), 'so blessing back.' The 4-line adverb of time, though it looks like an adverb to *Took* and *sang*, is really one to *human*. 'For the purpose of dropping down,' and the infinitives 'to toil,' 'suffer,' and 'die' are adverbs to *human*. In the $3\frac{1}{2}$-line adverb of purpose *so* means 'by that act of *raising hand and head*.'"

Book II. — Half-Rome.

Line 6. *Lorenzo in Lucina:* a church in the small square of San Lorenzo, opening out of the Corso. Founded in the fifth century, rebuilt by Paul V. 1606.

8. *Corso:* the principal thoroughfare of Rome.

83. *Guido Reni:* a painter of the Bolognese school (1574–1642). — *Christ on Cross:* represents the Crucifixion seen against a wild, stormy sky.

114. *The ancient:* Horace ("Satires," i. 7, 3, "Omnibus et lippis notum et tonsoribus").

125. *Molinos' doctrine:* see note, I. 303.

178. *Cardinal, who book-made on the same:* two or three books on the teachings of Molinos were written by Cardinal d'Estrées.

187. *Ruspoli:* palace on the Corso.

191. *Handsel:* first gift.

193. *Galliard:* brisk, active.

276. *Aretine:* native of Arezzo.

294. *Dab-chick:* a small-sized grebe, a genus of diving birds, frequenting rivers and fresh-water lakes. Its movements on land are ungainly, but it swims gracefully. Browning's use of the allusion appears to be at fault here.

298. *Church's tail:* see note, I. 260.

424. *Quoth Solomon:* Solomon's Song, iv. 9.

438. *Plutus:* God of Wealth, son of Jasion and Ceres.

470. *Verjuice:* juice of sour apples or unripe grapes.

484. *Doited:* adjective formed from *doit*, a Scotch coin of small value = worthless.

486. *Novercal:* in the manner of a step-mother.

509. *Cater-cousin:* a cousin within the first four degrees of kindred. — *Sib:* a blood relation.

532. *Jubilee:* held every twenty-fifth year.

577. *Principal of the usufruct: i. e.* the principal sum, in which Pietro had only a life-interest or usufruct.

687. *Carmel:* Mount Carmel in Syria, where the Carmelite order of mendicant monks was said to be established. They wore white.

706. *Posset:* a drink made of milk and wine.

816. *Mum, Budget:* see Shakespeare, "Merry Wives of Windsor," V. ii. 7.

959. *Osteria:* a tavern or inn.

1036. *Sbirri:* papal police.

1118. *Repugns:* opposes.

1132. *Fardel:* bundle.

1150. *Apage:* away with thee.

1189. *Convertites:* an order of nuns devoted to the rescue of others who, like themselves, have fallen.

1212. *Ovid, a like sufferer:* he was banished by Augustus to Tomis, on the Euxine Sea, for some amour or imprudence.

1235. *Pontifex Maximus:* in ancient Rome, any Vestal Virgin who let the sacred fire go out was scourged by the Pontifex Maximus.

1240. *Caponsacchi:* in English, *Head i' the Sack.* The family is mentioned in Dante's Paradise, xvi.

1242. *Firk:* chastise.

1261. *Canidian hate:* Canidia was a Neapolitan beloved by Horace. When she deserted him, he held her up to contempt as an old witch.

1333. *Domus pro carcere:* a house for a prison.

1368. *Hoard i' the heart o' the toad:* Fenton says, "There is to be found in the heads of old and great toads a stone they call borax or stelon, which, being used as rings, gives forewarning against venom. See "As You Like It," II. i. 15.

1466. *Astræa:* virgin-goddess of justice, daughter of Zeus and Themis, who departed from earth at the close of the golden age and became the constellation Virgo.

1477. *Male-Grissel:* Griselda, the heroine of Chaucer's Clerk of Oxenford's tale, a type of female patience.

1485. *Rolando-stroke:* Roland, the mediæval hero of romance, who wielded the famous sword Durandal.

1486. *Clavicle:* collar-bone.

Book III. — The Other Half-Rome.

Line 37. *Saint Anna's:* the monastery in Rome where Vittoria Colonna also awaited death.

58. *Carlo Maratta:* celebrated Roman painter (1625–1713) called "Carlo delle Madonne," on account of the great number of pictures of the Virgin he painted.

96. *Philosophic Sin:* Molinos taught that a soul in a state of perfect contemplation "desires nothing, not even his own salvation; and fears nothing, not even hell itself."

118. *Yon Triton:* see note, I. 890. The speaker is represented as being in the Piazza Barberini, near Bernini's fountain, composed of a Triton supported by dolphins.

159. *Usufructuary:* a person who has the use of the profits of a property.

235. *Tongue-leaved eye-figured Eden tree:* possibly a reference to some symbolic representation of the tree of Eden.

338. *Lured as larks by looking-glass:* refers to a kind of trap mounted on a pivot and set with little pieces of looking-glass which, exposed to the sun, by their brightness attract larks and other birds.

359. *Rutilant:* shining.

384. *The Hesperian ball:* the golden apple which Hercules was required to fetch from the garden of the Hesperides.

391. *The Square of Spain:* the Piazza di Spagna, in the present "English quarter" of Rome. The Via del Babbuino runs into it, and the "Boat-fountain" (Fontana della Barcaccia) stands in it.

401. *Cross: i. e.* a coin; an old expression, found in Goldsmith, Dryden, Shakespeare, and others. It originated from money with a cross stamped on it. — *Poke:* a pocket.

403. *Imposthume:* abscess.

439. *Danae:* shut up in an underground chamber, she was visited by Jupiter disguised as a shower of gold.

477. *A hinge:* the title *Cardinal* is derived from *cardo*, "a hinge."

498. *Doit:* see note, II. 484.

514. *Orts:* scraps.

518. *Quag* = quagmire.

566. *Great door:* according to the special ritual, the Pope, at the commencement of the Jubilee year, goes in solemn procession to a particular walled-up door (the Porta Aurea, or golden door of St. Peter's), and knocks three times, using the words of Psalm cxviii. 19, "Open to me the gates of righteousness." The doors are then opened and sprinkled with holy water, and the Pope passes through. When the Jubilee closes, the doorway is again built up.

571. *Penitentiary:* an officer in some cathedrals vested with power to absolve.

786. *Tenebrific:* gloomy.

834. *Charactery:* manner or means of expressing by characters.

1326. *The purple:* the color of the cardinals.

1347. *If so my worldly reputation burst, being the bubble it is:* recalls Shakespeare, "As You Like It," II. vii. 152.

1407. *Civita:* Civita Vecchia, a seaport near Rome.

1440. *Hundred Merry Tales:* Browning seems to be thinking here of "A C Mery Talys" (A Hundred Merry Tales), a collection of short stories published in England in 1526 by John Rastell. The titles in the table of contents are exactly in the manner of the story cited here, all beginning with "Of." A Roman citizen would, however, be more likely to have in mind Boccaccio's "Decameron," which contained a hundred stories.

1444. *Vulcan's part:* referring to Homer ("Odyssey," viii. 266 ff.), where Hephæstus (Vulcan) is deceived by Aphrodite (Venus), his wife, and Ares (Mars), her lover.

1483. *Mannaia:* see note, I. 1320.

1508. *Domus pro carcere:* see note, II. 1333.

Book IV. — Tertium Quid.

Line 31. *Trecentos inseris*, etc.: ho there! that is enough now! you are stowing in hundreds. (Horace, "Satires," i. 5. 12).

42. *Eusebius:* historian, 265–338.

54. *Basset:* a game of cards fashionable in the seventeenth century.

55. *Her Eminence:* an imitation of the Italian idiom, in which "His Eminence," as we should say, becomes "Sua Eminenza." Browning uses this idiom occasionally in the present book (*e. g.* ll. 469, 1622, 1624), but not regularly.

63. *Plebs:* the lowest political division of the Roman people — plebeians, opposed to the patricians, senators, and knights.

87. *Mudlarks:* sewer-cleaners and rag-pickers.

147. *Missal:* book of the mass, Roman Catholic prayer-book.

184. *Pauls:* Italian silver coins worth about ten cents each.

203. *Pinners:* lappets of a head-dress.

203. *Coif:* a cap.

206. *Orvieto:* wine from Orvieto.

337. *Nunc dimittis:* "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," etc., Luke ii. 22.

340. *Cits:* abbreviation of "citizens."

436. *Notum tonsoribus:* "known to the barbers." See note, II. 114. — *Tonsor:* barber.

447. *Zecchines:* sequins, coins worth about $2.25 each.

456. *Pomander:* a ball of pomade for the skin.

459. *Pantoufle:* slipper.

469. *Her Efficacity:* similar idiom to that referred to in line 55.

725. *Devil's-dung:* assafœtida, a vile-smelling drug.

756. *Cross-buttock:* a blow across the back. — *Quarter-staff:* a long, stout staff.

828. *Uzzah:* 2 Samuel vi. 6, 7; 1 Chronicles xiii.

10 (Hophni was wrongly put for Uzzah in earlier editions).

881. *Lucretia:* wife of Collatinus, whose praise of her above the wives of Tarquin and others was proved by finding her spinning at home, while the other wives were found dancing and revelling. — *Susanna:* wife of Joacim, wrongly accused and condemned to death, but proved innocent by Daniel, and her accusers shown to be the guilty ones. See Apocrypha.

883. *Leda:* Correggio's picture of Leda and the Swan, now in the Berlin Museum.

1048. *Cui profuerint:* whom they might profit.

1063. *Acquetta:* Aqua Tofana, a poisonous liquid much used in Italy in the seventeenth century.

1137. *Paphos:* Paphos, in Cyprus, was the headquarters of the worship of Aphrodite, which was there accompanied by licentious rites and practices.

1228. *Saint Rose:* the Virgin Martyr of Bethlehem who rejected the suit of Hamuel, and therefore was accused by him and condemned to be burned alive, but the flames caught at Hamuel and burned him instead; leaving her unhurt, and her stake budded and bloomed with red and white roses, "the first that ever any man saw."

1229. *Olimpia:* the sister-in-law or the niece of Pope Innocent X. (1644) — both bore the name of Olimpia; — but the niece outdid her mother in voluptuousness.

1274. *Place Navona:* an oblong square in which are three fountains.

1567. *Fons et origo Malorum:* the fount and origin of evils.

Book V. — Count Guido Franceschini.

Line 5. *Velletri:* wine made at Velletri, whose volcanic soil was especially favorable for vine culture.

38. *Vigil-torment:* see note, I. 972.

63. *Sib:* see note, II. 509.

84. *Headed:* old form of "beheaded."

118. *Omoplat:* shoulder-blade.

135. *Whealed:* marked by strokes.

149. *Francis:* St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the order of Franciscans, 1182–1226.

153. *Dominic:* St. Dominic, founder of the order of Dominicans, 1170–1221.

158. *Homager:* one who holds lands subject to homage.

203. *Tract against Molinos:* probably imaginary. Cardinal Cibo, Secretary of State to Pope Innocent XI., wrote in 1686 a tract rehearsing and confuting the main propositions of Molinos.

207. *Suum cuique:* let each have his own.

227. *Porporate:* wearing purple, the color of a cardinal.

284. *Utrique sic paratus:* thus prepared for either.

303. *Term:* a figure of Terminus, the god of boundaries, consisting of a bust ending in a rectangular pedestal.

312. *Sylla, Marius:* Roman generals.

313. *Hexastich:* stanza of six lines.

317. *Purfled:* decorated.

321. *Tittup:* a skittish prance or canter.

324. *New Prisons:* built by Innocent X., were the first prisons on the cellular system in Europe. — *Tordinona:* Tower of Nona, used as a prison, and destroyed in 1690; therefore Guido could not have been imprisoned in it.

363. *Limes:* ensnares.

401. *Sors:* lot. — *There's a right Virgilian dip!* the Romans used to open their Virgil at random for guidance.

417. *Truck:* exchange.

486. *Pietro of Cortona:* mainly a scenic and fresco painter, 1596–1669.

487. *Ciro Ferri:* a pupil of Cortona who imitated his master, 1634–1689.

540. *Baioc:* about a halfpenny.

557. *Plautus:* a famous comic poet of Rome, died 184 B.C. — *Terence:* celebrated dramatist, writer of comedies, died 159 B.C. — *Boccaccio's Book:* "Decameron" (1313–1375).

558. *Ser Franco:* apparently Franco Sacchetti, who lived about 1335–1410, author of stories in the manner of Boccaccio. Petrarch, to whom the term "townsman" better applies (since Sacchetti, though a Tuscan, was a Florentine), wrote nothing that can be described as "merry tales."

623. *Soldo:* about a penny.

625. *Caligula:* a Roman emperor, celebrated for his cruelties, murdered A.D. 41.

670. *Thyrsis:* a young Arcadian shepherd in Virgil's Seventh Eclogue. — *Neæra:* a country maid mentioned in Virgil's Eclogues iii. and v.

736. *Francis' manna:* the Franciscans depended upon alms for their food and living.

738. *Levite-rule* = priest-rule.

809. *Locusta:* the name of a notorious female poisoner at Rome in the first century; hence typical of any poisoner. She helped Nero to poison Britannicus.

847. *Lathen* = latten, a kind of brass or bronze. See note, I. 1231.

848. *Bilboa:* a flexible-bladed cutlass named from Bilboa, the Spanish adventurer and American discoverer.

920. *Stans pede in uno:* "standing on one foot," a metaphor descriptive of anything done easily or off-hand; from Horace, "Satires," i. 4, 10.

921. *Plainsong:* simple early chants of the church.

1102. *Gamaliel:* Acts xxii. 3.

1132. *Succubus:* a demon that has been conjured up.

1204. *Catullus:* a learned but wanton poet, 87–47 B.C.

1277. *Ultima Thule:* the name given by the ancients to the farthest land known to the north, supposed to be either Iceland or the Orkneys.

1278. *Proxima Civitas:* the nearest city.

1351. *Ovid's art:* Ovid wrote a book on "The Art of Love."

1352. *Summa:* the "Summa Theologiæ," by St. Thomas Aquinas, from which the priests of the Roman Church study their theology.

1353. *Corinna:* Ovid's mistress Julia was celebrated by him under the name of *Corinna*.

1359. *Merum sal:* pure salt.

1542. *Quis est pro Domino:* who is on the Lord's side?

1749. *Ad judices meos:* to my judges.

1769. *Legist:* a lawyer.

1770. *Justinian's Pandects:* the digest of Roman jurists made by order of Justinian in the sixth century.

1902. *Stinche:* a prison.

1998. *Soldier-bee:* a bee that fights for the protection of the hive and sacrifices his life in the act of using his sting.

1999. *Exenterate:* disembowelled.

Book VI. — Giuseppe Caponsacchi.

Line 57. *Casting lots . . . for the coat of One:* Matthew xxvii. 35.

226. *Capo-in-Sacco:*

> "Already had Caponsacco to the Market
> From Fiesole descended."
>
> (Dante's "Paradiso," xvi. 121.)

230. *Mercato:* market (see preceding note).

245. *Ferdinand:* Ferdinand II., Grand-duke of Tuscany, 1621–1670, one of the Medici.

279. *Sacrosanct:* the Hebrews, regarding the Sacred Name as unspeakable, substitute *Adonai* for *Jahwé* in reading.

290. *Diocletian:* the Roman Emperor (284–305) under whom the last persecutions of the Christians were held.

314. *Onesimus:* Philemon, verses 11, 18.

316. *Agrippa:* Acts xxvii.

319. *Fénelon:* the French preacher and archbishop of Cambrai (1651–1751), who adopted the mystical doctrines of Molinos.

329. *A Marinesque Adoniad:* alluding to the "Adone" of Giovanni Battista Marino (or Marini), published in 1623, and very popular during the seventeenth century.

342. *Pieve:* Sta. Maria della Pieve, one of the principal parish churches in Arezzo.

345. *Tarocs:* a card game.

384. *Catullus:* the Latin poet, especially distinguished for the elegance and polish of his verse (87–47 B.C.).

385. *Break Priscian's head:* break the rules of classical Latin grammar, on which Priscian was the most famous ancient authority; referring to the less pure idiom of church or mediæval Latin, which recourse to Ovid, distinctively a secular favorite among Latin poets (43 B.C.–18 A.D.), might soothe.

398. *Facchini:* porters.

445. *In excelsis . . . secula seculorum:* the gloria chanted at the end of each Psalm; in Latin in Roman Catholic churches, in English in the Anglican church.

452. *Marino:* the Italian poet, who wrote the "Adonis" already referred to (l. 329), and who was famed in his day (1569) and patronized by cardinals and kings.

462. *Canzonet:* a one-, two-, or three-part song.

479. *Summa:* the "Summa Theologiæ," or Summary of Theology, of Thomas Aquinas.

551. *Thyrsis and Myrtilla:* common names in pastoral poetry for shepherd and maid in love with each other.

566. *Ave: Ave Maria* or "Hail Mary," etc., the prayer used at evening.

574. *Philomel:* Philomela's sorrows are sung by the nightingale into whose form the maiden passed, according to the fable referred to here. See also, Shakespeare, "Rape of Lucrece," 1135.

695. *Our Lady:* the Virgin Mary painted with a sword in her breast to represent her griefs, St. Luke xi. 35.

945. *Saint Thomas:* Aquinas. See note on l. 479.

946. *Cephisian reed:* the reeds of Cephisus, one of the rivers of Athens.

973. *His corona:* his rosary.

987. *The fabled garden:* of the Hesperides, where the golden apple was guarded by a dragon.

1086. *Our Lady's girdle:* according to the tradition,

the Virgin, on her ascent to heaven, loosened her girdle, which fell into the hands of the doubting apostle, St. Thomas.

1143. *God's sea:* Revelation iv. 6.

1151. *Parian:* pure marble from Paros. — *Coprolite:* petrified dung of carnivorous reptiles.

1185. *Assisi . . . holy ground:* because St. Francis was born there in 1182, founder of the order of Franciscan monks and the monastery of St. Francis.

1246. *The angelus:* the brief service said at the toll of the bell, at morn, noon, and night, consisting of the *Ave*, or "Hail, Mary," etc., with versicle response and a collect.

1367. *Gaetano . . . whose name:* see Book VII. 100.

1434. *Vulcan pursuing Mars:* the story of Vulcan's discovering the love of Venus and Mars, already referred to by Guido.

1462. *Molière's:* an allusion to the play "Don Juan," wherein Molière (1622–1673) makes the libertine husband claim Donna Elvire, the nun, as his wife.

1594. *The paten:* the plate or chalice on which the sacred bread of the communion service is carried.

1633. *Pasquin:* the name given to a statue in Rome (from Pasquino, a cobbler, whose shop opposite to it was a centre of gossip) on which anonymous squibs were posted. (See note, XII. 140.)

1640. *Bembo:* secretary to Pope Leo X., and a well-known man of letters (1470-1547).

1641. *De Tribus:* the blasphemous and legendary tract "De Tribus Impostoribus" (Moses, Mahomet, and Christ), often referred to in the Middle Ages. (For an account of this curious tradition of a non-existent or secret work see "Poet-lore," vol. vi. p. 248.)

1665. *Sub imputatione meretricis laborat:* "labors under the imputation of unchastity."

1705. *Potiphar:* Genesis xxxix. 10.

1720. *De Raptu Helenæ:* of the carrying off of Helen of Troy.

1724. *Scazons:* iambic verses, with a spondee in the final foot instead of an iambus.

1984. *Probationis ob defectum:* "for want of sufficient proof."

2032. *Augustinian . . . who writes the letter:* Frà Celestino Angelo di Sant Anna, the Augustinian monk who confessed Pompilia, and whose deposition is given in a contemporary pamphlet describing the case, which fell into Browning's hands in London. The confessor concluded his deposition as follows: "I do not say more for fear of being taxed with partiality. I know well that God alone can examine the heart. But I know also that from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks; and that my great St. Augustine says: 'As the life was, so is its end.'"

2070. *Plutarch:* whose book relates the lives of Greek and Roman heroes.

END OF VOL. I.

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